

A ★ FISHER GIRL
OF FRANCE



FERNAND CALMETTES

O.P.

4
75

100
Alice

With love from
Henry

Christmas 1892



SHE PRESSED MORE CLOSELY THE HAND OF HER LITTLE BROTHER.

Frontispiece.

A FISHER GIRL OF FRANCE

FROM THE FRENCH OF
FERNAND CALMETTES

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE AUTHOR

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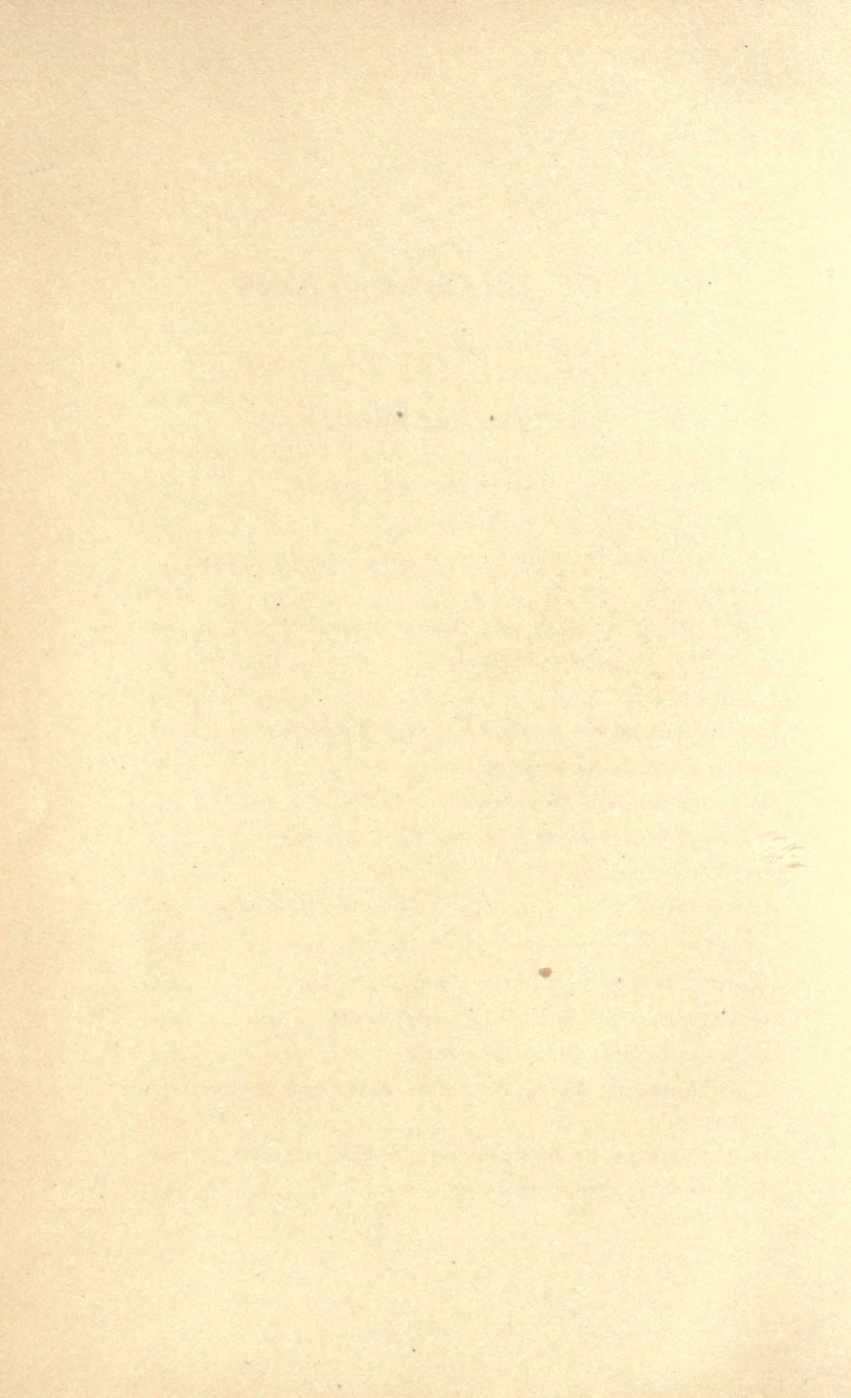
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A

FISHER GIRL OF FRANCE.

CHAPTER I.

TO-MORROW at daybreak they will go aboard together, Elise Hénin and her little brother Firmin. They have put on their Sunday clothes to say farewell to their mother, who sleeps on the slope of the dune in a corner of the old graveyard. Nine years has the poor woman lain there in the peace of her last sleep—deaf forever to the noise of the tempests which roused her so often, of old, to the vigil of anxious nights.

She went from the cares of life a long time before her husband. He was swallowed up by the sea, which never gave back his body. One night, when the wind was not high—one hardly knows how it came about—he was caught in a fatal current and was lost, with his boat and six companions, in the wild eddies of the most dangerous shoal on that coast. In some shelter for shipwrecked sailors, beneath the wave, he is waiting for a day, perhaps not distant, when a mighty tempest shall stir the depths and, opening his prison of sand, return his body to earth again.

His death brought ruin to his family. Although he was a skipper, yet his boat was all he owned. Earning more or less at the risk of the tides, he was returning from a profitable cruise with a happy heart and a full purse, for he had sold his fish at a good price at the market of Boulogne. The sea had all in its grip—man, boat, and earnings.

From the road that climbed the dune one could see the spot beneath one on the horizon. The color of the sea was lighter there than over the depths, and the rays of the sun made it glisten with a silvery sheen. It seemed so smiling that one would have declared it harmless.

Elise stopped as her thoughts wandered to that accursed gulf. She pressed more closely the hand of her little brother, as a mother who fears for her child's safety.

For it was she who had brought him up, this twelve-year-old brother, whom she loves for his sturdy figure and his robust health. She has had one idea only, that of making him a good sailor. It was she who sang him sailors' songs to put him to sleep when little; it was she who carried him, hardly awake, along the dune crests to show him the far-off ships and to direct his first look to what was going on at sea. It was she, too, who took him to the harbor that he might play among the rigging.

Then, when they were old enough, they had gone with their father on his boat, learning to handle it. Elise knew as much about fishing as a sailor. Her father was very proud of her. He had her always aboard, and it was a miracle that she had not been

lost with him. But that week she had been kept at home, because Firmin was ill. She wished to take care of him herself, and would not trust him to strange hands. And so they had become orphans, sister and brother, without protection and without bread.

But to-day their fortune seemed assured. They had been engaged on a sloop for the coming herring fishery. Elise had persuaded the skipper, her cousin and godfather, to take them on his boat notwithstanding the prejudice which sailors in petticoats generally inspire. She was as strong as a man and asked less wages, and this was so much in her favor.

For herself it was enough that she was to be with her brother, apart from whom she would have been too unhappy to live.

"I am proud of you," she said gayly, "you will make a fine ship's boy. I was afraid to remain at home alone. Come, make haste, we have still many things to arrange for our departure."

And with a lengthened step she hurried the boy along the sandy dune road. It was high noon. The strong June sun, directly overhead, darted down its burning rays, but the young girl did not appear to feel them. Lithe and alert, she moved along, with figure erect and back slightly arched, in all the vigor of her nineteen years.

Her graceful contour stood out distinctly against the sky. It had little of that masculine strength that marks savage beauties, but under her brown corset and gray skirt one could divine the clear-cut outline which distinguishes the purer races.

Hurrying her brother along, she soon gained the crest of the dune; then she stopped abruptly, with an involuntary start, for at the turn of the road she saw before her the figure of a strapping young fellow, his arms swinging as he walked, and his face pale and a little sad.

"You have frightened us, Silvere. It is not the time for a stroll. Are you expecting any one?"

"Yes, you, Elise. I had an idea that you would come here, and I ventured, in order to have a last word with you. Is it decided that you are to sail to-morrow?"

"Certainly! we have to earn our bread."

"If you would but consent, I would manage to earn enough for us both. Elise, it breaks my heart to see you injure yourself with men's work."

"What would you have? I know no other, nor have I a taste for any other."

"If you would marry me, you would have only to keep the house. Will you make me wretched by refusing me again?"

"Silvere, I do not wish to give you pain, but it is not right of you to urge me always against my duty. I have told you my determination. I do not intend to marry until the day when my little Firmin shall be of an age to be a real sailor. It is my duty to help him, since I am the same as his mother."

"We would aid him together."

"No, he would not be at all happy if he knew that he was an expense to another. And then, I am ambitious that he should become a skipper as his father was. I could not give myself up to this if I

married you. When one has a house one should devote one's self to it."

"Then you leave me no hope?"

"As I have told you, wait. Give me time to bring up the child. I will not refuse after that."

"All the same, it is a long time to wait."

Elise had not let go the hand of her brother, which she held pressed in her own. She felt it stirring, tugging.

"What do you wish, my little man, what troubles you?"

"Bend down, I wish to whisper to you."

And his lips raised toward his sister's ear, in a grumbling tone the lad told his trouble. He did not wish his sister's marriage to be put off on his account. He was old enough to go to sea alone. He pressed his point with an energy one would not have expected in a lad of his years. As he spoke he put on a resolute air, and under his close-cut hair his strong features expressed so vigorous a will that Elise was much disturbed.

"You are a brave boy, but you are too young to go without me. Never mind. I shall not be unhappy as long as we are together and you love me."

With her sweetest look she smiled at the lad, then, turning toward Silvere, she gave him her hand.

"Silvere, since our engagement is to be long, come with me to the graveyard. Let us exchange our vows over the grave of my mother."

And pensively, without speaking further, she walked on, supported on one side by her lover while on the other she led her brother.

The graveyard was near at hand. Above its low wall could be seen, lost among dusty tamarisks and brambles already turning brown, some stone tombs and some crosses of worn-out wood, tottering and almost uprooted by the west wind. It was well called the field of the dead, for under the pitiless sun it seemed a desert indeed. Silvere stopped short at the melancholy sight. With an unconscious gesture, he held back the young girl.

"Elise, do not let us plight our troth here. It is too sad."

"Nevertheless, come. Mother will not be happy if we fail in respect. I have no one but her to advise me, since my father is beneath the sea."

Along the narrow footpaths she led the young man to the highest point of the cemetery, where there was the least shelter. There, in a forgotten corner, a slab, defaced and broken at the corners, alone marked the spot which the children knew to be their mother's resting-place.

"Mother," said Elise solemnly, "since our dead father's soul is no more with us, it is thy wish which I would obey. Make thy soul pass into mine."

And on her knees beside Silvere, their two hands joined, she waited for the mother's blessing to penetrate her heart.

An alkaline vapor rose from the overheated soil, and came suffocatingly to their nostrils. Silvere had a feeling of faintness. He rose, trying to lift Elise, but for some time still she remained at prayer, invoking on her brother and herself the protection of the dead.

CHAPTER II.

IT was hardly daybreak when Elise and Firmin appeared on the wharf, pushing before them a wheelbarrow, on which were their sailors' kits. They were the first to arrive. The tide had gone out and, aground in the mud, the sleeping boats seemed to await in the silence of the dawn the hour for waking. Such of them as were being made ready for sea could be told by the marks of recent overhauling and their newly tarred rigging. Here lay the *Bon-Pêcheur*, a sloop, broad in the waist but tapering gracefully, and well-designed to cut the waves. All was in order on deck. The closed hatches showed that supplies were stowed away and everything ready.

Elise stopped short. From the head of the wharf, across the masts and rigging, she could perceive the Bay of Somme, which the sun was just softly lighting up. Since her childhood she had known this great clear bay, with its gray outlines softening away into fog. She would not see it again that night. Every day she had come faithfully to give it a look. She loved it, not only when the tide was high and it reflected the brightness of the heavens in its palpitating waves, but when, though bare at low tide, it was still beautiful, with its banks of red

sand and its streams of water winding through it to the great sea.

Each day she had seen on the opposite bank the outline of the town of Saint-Valery, raised like a fortress on a rock of verdure. Then she had turned her happy eyes toward her own modest fishing hamlet, which, on this side of the bay, sheltered itself discreetly behind the sandy dunes. She would see none of these things that night. She loved them truly, as one loves one's birthplace, but she loved also the great sea which, four miles away, marked by a crystal line, all white with foam, the limit of the bay. Elise had often crossed that line in her father's boat, and during three years of fishing she had been accustomed to sea life, but she had never quitted the waters of the English Channel, and it was in new seas that she was to be through the long hard-worked months of a fishing cruise. Her breast swelled with longing and a vague inquietude, and she let her thoughts wander toward that infinity of heaven and water.

The sands of the bay disappeared little by little under the rising tide, whose surface, swept by ripples, announced a steady breeze. It was an excellent omen. In less than six days they ought to be on the fishing-grounds, a hundred miles north of Scotland.

But, coming back to the thought of her departure, Elise went down from the wharf to the sands, and deposited her burden just under the bows of the *Bon-Pêcheur*, and, while Firmin went to return the wheelbarrow, she seated herself on her sack, her

hands joined, her thoughts wandering to the far-distant region with which she was to make acquaintance. Absorbed in her reverie, she did not hear heavy steps behind her, and started under a strong hand which struck her familiarly on the shoulder.

"Elise, you are earlier than the tide. They are good sailors who rise before the fish."

"Should it not be so, Cousin Florimond? One must take trouble if one wishes to escape it."

"You are right. That is a good sailor's rule. Do you know, you look very well under your new sou'-wester? The keenest eye could hardly tell you from the other sailor lads."

"I will be a man when work is to be done, Cousin Florimond. I have no fear of work."

"*Parbleu!* All will turn out well if your Firmin does not show himself obstinate. He is a little inclined that way. He does not always do as one tells him."

"Have no fear, Cousin Florimond, he will obey you as willingly as his father. Surely, that is one's duty to the skipper."

"Surely. Besides I shall not favor him more than any other. Fishing is hard work, but it makes good sailors. In three seasons he will understand his business. Then you will be able to leave him alone and talk of a husband. A husband is never lacking to a worthy girl."

Then, with that rolling step which sailors affect so much on land, the skipper walked to the boat's stern. He seemed to step with the whole weight of his body upon the ground, but hardly had he felt the

guards of the sloop under his hand than he recovered his agility, notwithstanding his great leather boots and his oil-suit. Taking advantage of the rudder-post and of the sloping side of the boat, in three tugs of his arms, and four steps, he hoisted himself on deck. And there, striding about, he was truly superb with his tall figure, his broad shoulders, his curving chest, his strong arms, and his sturdy back. The sailor is beautiful only on his boat.

At that moment Florimond had the bearing which inspires all leaders at the hour of action. He inhaled long draughts of the breeze, and with keen eye he examined the sky to see the signs of the weather.

"Look then, Elise, the weather seems not half bad. One never lies idle when one works with the breeze. Hand over the sacks." He stretched his arm out to receive them, and then, lying down flat, reached down, seized the girl with both hands and, raising himself all at once, lifted her on deck.

"Now you are one of the crew, Elise. If the others are disagreeable, I will protect you. Every man has his rights on a boat."

"Thanks, Cousin Florimond, but, as long as I do my work without flinching, they will have no reason to speak ill of me. If they are disagreeable, I will defend myself."

"Shall not I be there to make them hold their tongues?" said a little voice, behind the young girl, a boy's voice, bold and confident. It was Firmin, who had returned. He planted himself, with his arms crossed and his head thrown back, before his sister,

"There is one man who talks against us. I have heard him! I will make him eat his words."

And as if to defy the enemy he awaited, he looked resolutely at the hamlet.

From it the sailors were coming in a body, their wives and children with them. They walked silently beside a cart, which made its way slowly under the weight of their kits. When they reached the boat, there broke out at once the noise of getting aboard and the shouts of farewell. For the tide was beginning to lick the keel of the *Bon-Pêcheur*, and the women and children ran for safety to the wharf where, crowded together, they awaited her departure. Softly the sea lifted the sloop, which floated like a sea-gull on the wave.

"Hoist the jib and the staysail. Hoist the jigger." And the canvas, forward and aft, spread itself as if to try the breeze.

"Trip the anchor!" And the chain, as the anchor came home, ground against the gunwale.

"Hoist the mainsail!" Two hundred and twenty yards of canvas rose in air by force of hand. All tugged together, Elise among the rest. Knowing that she was watched she strained every nerve; her body grew rigid at the work. "Oh! hiss!" Her voice sounded clear above the hoarse shouts of her companions. "Oh! hiss!" The pulleys groaned under the ropes, and the great sail hung ready to take the wind.

"Give her a full." The topsails snapped out. All the canvas was trimmed to catch the breeze, and, set in motion by a shift of the helm, the *Bon-Pêcheur*

sped gayly northward in the freshness and purity of the morning.

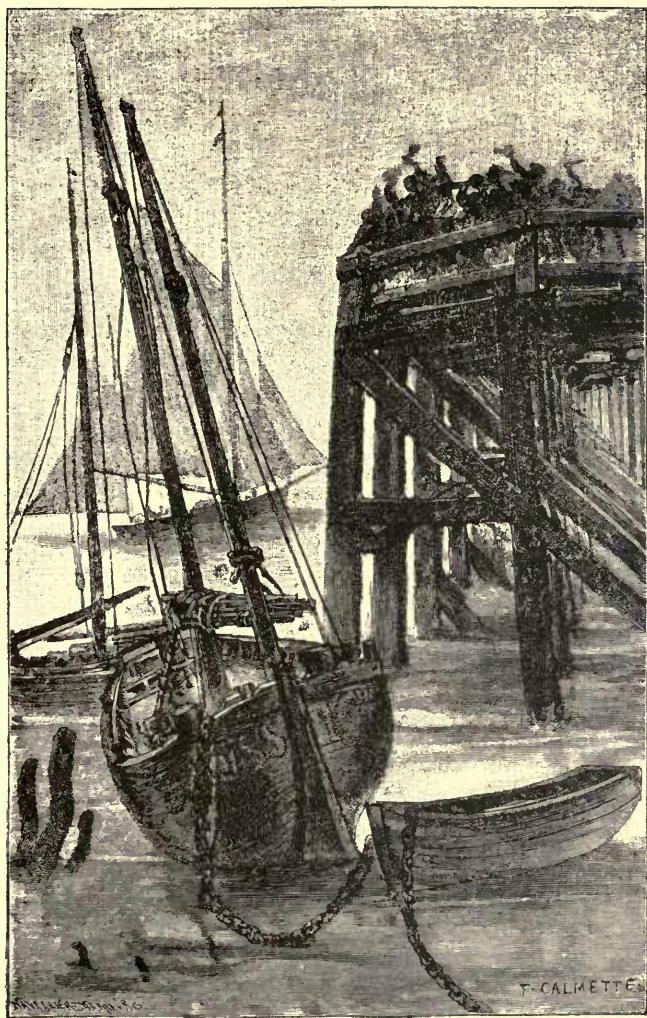
But a small boat hailed them. A rope was thrown, and Silvere, climbing up it, quickly reached the deck. He walked straight to the skipper, and in a rough tone explained the reason of his coming. He had an account to settle with Barnabé.

Barnabé was called. He was a hap-hazard sailor, half landsman half seaman, such as are engaged for the herring fishery.

An unruly wag and a great bungler at work, he had not his equal in gathering a crew about him to listen to his bluster. He was brave when occasion called for it, through vanity, and he had acquired the reputation among the fishermen of a man who feared nothing. Although his character was known, he was engaged from force of habit. When one has to choose among landsmen, one man is as good as another.

His quarrelsome tongue spared no one. Scarcely had he learned of Elise's engagement than he began to trouble the whole village with his threats. Was it right to allow women to steal men's work? Theirs would be strong arms to handle the canvas in the teeth of a squall! And the night before, in an outburst of drunken speech, he had made threats. They would see if he would allow his bread to be eaten by this Lison. He would rather send her head-first overboard.

As soon as he was awake that morning Silvere had heard these threats, and, changed as they were in passing from mouth to mouth, they alarmed him.



THE "BON PECHEUR" SPED GAILY NORTHWARD.

greatly. His character was sweet and thoughtful; he had thus a tendency to exaggerate the worst side of things, and, lost in fear for Elise, he had run to the pier, but too late. Then he had thrown himself into his boat, urging it on in order to overtake the *Bon-Pêcheur* and prevent trouble. Like all gentle men, he had over-excited himself that he might appear more strong. When he saw himself face to face with Barnabé, he raised his voice, to intimidate him.

"You were talking of Elise last night. If you dare to trouble her, I will make an end of you when you return."

"Where do you get a right to defend her? Is she your wife? She is not in love with you, I fancy, you old tub with gaping seams."

"I speak, because we are betrothed."

"She has promised herself to you, you great snuffer of the moon? She has, then, a fancy for sallow men only."

"Be quiet, great blackguard, or I will take down your conceit."

"Don't try it, I have my stingers to defend me."

And Barnabé showed his fists doubled up for attack. Small, but thickset and muscular in proportion, he squared himself on his short legs before the tall man who stood before him, taken aback by his uncertain movements.

A fight appeared imminent. The deck was nearly deserted, the greater part of the crew busy-ing themselves in arranging their effects in the fore-castle. Two men stationed in the bow took no

notice, busy as they were in managing the jib, while astern, the sailor at the jigger, while he handled his sheet, looked on and laughed like an amateur of fist-cuffs. He seemed truly happy at this unexpected exhibition which was coming off so near him. As to the skipper, not being able to leave the tiller, he swore and threatened; then, despairing of silencing the adversaries, he tried to drown their voices, and shouted his orders at his loudest.

"Ready to come about. Let go the jib-sheet."

And the boat tacked, drawing away at right angles to avoid a perilous set of the current; but all the same the quarrel continued, more clamorous and more deafening.

"Great child of misery, sailor by sufferance, you gape in the seams. You should be careened and calked."

"Wretched landlubber, ship's cook, you should remain in your pantry. The fish which has gone ashore is spoiled for the sea."

"Speak for yourself, you badly salted codfish."

"Wretched worm."

In vain the skipper shouted: "Keep away to star-board." The men no longer heard him, and the jib, remaining as it was, forced the boat in an exasperating fashion to port. The skipper broke out in fury, stamping excitedly, and leaning forward shouted:

"Enough, Silvere, I cannot steer the boat. We are at the harbor bar."

His shouts mingled with those of the sailor astern, who was urging Barnabé on.

"Hou! Hou! Little one, take a reef in the big fellow's sail! He is going to run. Overhaul him amidships."

Barnabé, as if obeying these suggestions, squared himself like an athlete throwing out his defiance.

"Come alongside a little, old wreck. Look out for the grapnels."

"I am not afraid of you, you are like a fish, strong in the head only."

And among these clamors the useless calls of the skipper:

"Quiet there! Thunder! We are sagging off a point. We shall strike. Starboard!"

But his orders did not reach the bow, so thoroughly were they cut off by the torrent of angry words which came clamoring forth like the noise of a tempest. And above all this tumult could be heard the voice of the sailor astern:

"Hou! Hou! Little one, overhaul the big fellow amidships! He is too tall-masted, he will be weak in squalls. Capsize him; turn him keel upward."

Barnabé advanced with his fists thrust forward. But in an instant Silvere's great hands came down upon him, sent him rolling over and over even to where the sailor stood, picked him up again like a beaten dog, and, holding him over the boat's side, shook him above the yawning abyss beneath.

"Let go," bawled the sailor at the jigger, laughing uproariously; "let go; he is fat enough to float alone."

Silvere still kept shaking him.

"Barnabé, swear never to do any harm to Elise. Swear, or I will drop you." And his two hands tightened their grip.

Barnabé uttered a cry like that of a wounded beast—a cry which cut the air with its shrillness. From the forecastle came hurrying all the sailors, snatched from their work by this despairing appeal. Elise was foremost. She took in the situation at a glance; rushing to the guards she caught hold of Barnabé, and with a half turn of her arm threw him on the deck at the skipper's feet.

But at the same instant without a shock, gently, like a porpoise as he rises, the *Bon-Pêcheur* lay over on her side.

"Aground! Thunder!" and the skipper's shout went like a shiver through the crew. The pressure of the wind on the sails pressed the keel still further into the sand. "Let go all!" And in an instant every sail was flapping, and the *Bon-Pêcheur* lay still, lying well over, a sight at once laughable and pitiable, like a stranded whale.

Then, indeed, there were outbursts of rage on the deck. Silvere and Barnabé were threatened. Elise was accused. It was her fault. Was not the skipper forewarned? Women are always the cause of trouble. And Florimond thought to himself that perhaps the sailors were right.

CHAPTER III.

THEN followed a tedious waiting.

At first thought, the situation did not appear very serious. If the *Bon-Pêcheur* could not get off unassisted, she could easily be drawn into deep water by a few turns of the wheels of a tug. By good fortune the bar on which she had stranded was so hard that there was no fear of those shifting sands, which, now washed away, now washed back again, end by piling themselves up about a boat and holding her fast in their clutch.

In still days one could have slept there a year through without running more danger than in one's bed; but the Southern sky did not promise settled weather. There was a look that betokened the presence of wind, and, if it should rise, it would bring on a heavy swell in a quarter of an hour, and in that case the *Bon-Pêcheur* would be rolled about like a cask.

Silvere had gone off in his boat, charged to take the necessary steps to summon a tug from the nearest point possible. It was early morning when he left. They had watched him until he had reached the wharf, and then, from the numbers crowded together on the end of the quay, could tell that the alarm had been given. But now night was approaching. Time enough had passed to account

for any ordinary delays, and the men of the *Bon-Pêcheur*, standing about on the deck, watched the sea anxiously.

Florimond was the most impatient of all. Climbing on the gunwale he searched the horizon with his glass. Steamers passed and repassed, staining the sky with their train of smoke, but all held an unchanged course, far away from the *Bon-Pêcheur*. Not one of them looked like a tug, with its gray hull and red band.

At the same time the threatened wind from the south began to rise, and with it came a heavy and laboring swell. Florimond could not contain himself longer. He strode from bow to stern, distracted between the coming danger and the belated succor.

Seated at the foot of the mast, Elise abandoned herself to melancholy thoughts. Although in no way responsible for their running aground, she felt after all an indirect responsibility. It was a wretched beginning of a sailor's life for her.

She had her arm about Firmin and the two, sister and brother, in their attitude of distress, seemed like shipwrecked mariners. When he cast his eye on them in his restless walk about the deck, Florimond, thinking of the sloop perhaps lost, and of the ruin which he laid at their doors, gave them a surly look of disapprobation. And all the crew, sharing the skipper's feeling, contemptuously left them alone.

Barnabé was triumphant. He went among the men, exciting them against Elise. Why should they not demand at once that this creature of ill-

luck be put ashore. Her nets should be kept to make good the injury of which she had been the cause. As he talked, he turned toward Elise with threatening gestures.

Firmin could not keep down his anger. He freed himself from his sister's arm and advanced, his little fist clenched.

"Have you not had enough, Barnabé? I will give you as much more as you wish."

But the landsman knew this time that he was backed by the others. He would risk his revenge. With foot and hand he sent the child reeling heavily against the bulwark. There was a hard dull thud as he struck. Elise sprang to her feet, and ran to her brother's help. It was the signal for an outburst. The men, mad with anxiety, were by this time ready for anything. They came headlong at Barnabé's cry.

"Let us make an end of this Lison! She eats our bread! She sends her lover to shipwreck us! Overboard with her!"

And losing their heads at his outcries, full of desire for vengeance, without stopping to think, the sailors closed around their victim, each man involuntarily stretching out his arms to seize her. On her knees, bent forward, Elise hid her pale face between her arms, while she covered Firmin with her body. Then she closed her eyes, to escape the sight at least of death. Her fingers dug themselves into her blouse. She felt herself dragged, then lifted up and carried along; she had a feeling of space, a fear of the yawning gulf. Resigned, without hate and

without bitterness, she gave way to her distress and murmured:

"Farewell, dear Firmin, I am going to our father!"

Suddenly she felt herself falling. She struck on the boat's edge, then, half stunned, fell headlong into the sea. Entangled in the folds of her oilskin dress, she struck out blindly like a drowning cat. It seemed to her as if a gulf opened beneath her, and that brutal laughter and jeering outburst from overhead sought her out and followed her, even under the wave. Her ears hummed, her eyes opened despairingly, the water in her throat strangled her. Then, vaguely, came a supreme desire to live; she was in a last revolt at this wrong of destiny, which forced her to die before her time, and splashing unconsciously, she came to the surface again. It was for an instant only, merely time to draw one more breath of air and life. Then, and this time without hope and nearly without consciousness, she sank under her own weight.

What freshness! what peace! Her temples beat less strongly, and her chest rose and fell quietly, as her breath came and went. Who, then, had seized her and snatched her from nothingness? All her senses came to life again. What was this? Oaths and bad language! *Tonnerre!* School of sharks! Pirates!

She opened her eyes. She was on the deck, and bending over her a young blond sailor, with eyes like the gray of the skies, and with a pleasant voice, watched her with a respectful admiration.

"Mam'selle Elise, it is I, Chrétien; do you recognize me? The rascals would have drowned you, like a fly in a great cup. I was just in time to save you."

"Sharks! Pirates!" Then Elise saw Florimond, armed with a grapnel, striking right and left among the sailors. Near her, by the side of the unconscious Firmin, she discovered Barnabé stretched senseless, his forehead slashed with blood.

"Firmin, my child!"

At that instant, at a sinister whistling in the rigging, there was a sudden outburst.

"The wind! It is coming to destroy us!"

Elise raised herself. Tottering still, she kept her feet by a strong effort of will. With an uncertain step she reached Firmin, collected all her energies, and, finding her strength come back as she put it to the test, raised the boy in her arms and carried him to the fore-castle. There she put him into a bunk, covered him warmly, and tucked him in well. Then, dripping still, without waiting to put on dry clothes, without taking breath even, she hurried back, to be ready for anything in facing this new assault of death.

A great wave was advancing at frightful speed, threatening to engulf the sloop under its mass. Its crest, white with spray, was hardly a hundred fathoms away. The sailors ran to and fro, arms in air like crazy men, except Florimond, who, counting only on the jigger, held himself ready.

"A man to the helm! Keep to starboard!"

Whoever took the tiller would meet all the force of the wave. What of that! Elise ran forward.

"No, not the girl! *Tonnerre!* She is too weak in the arms."

But the wave was now not more than twenty fathoms away. There was no time for hesitation. Elise stayed at her post.

"Hold hard! *Tonnerre!*"

The sailors clung desperately to the ropes. The wave broke over them.

"Courage, Lison, port, port! *Tonnerre!*"

With all the strength of her muscles, with all her might and main, Elise threw her weight on the tiller. The sloop careened in a mad plunge, as if she was lying down to die. The masts almost touched the water. Everything rolled about the deck, the flying rigging, the ropes, and the body of Barnabé. The men were up to their waists in water. Elise kept her footing. Then a new uproar! Everything again afloat! The sloop righted, careened, plunged! A blow harder than any yet drove her forward. As she righted, she lay on an even keel. She was afloat. "Hoist all sail!" As if giddy with joy, swept onward in safety by the wind, the *Bon-Pêcheur* darted forward, forgetting all past dangers.

Proud of her flowing sail she was off, weathering buoys and beacons, coming about according to the currents. She had such a frenzy of speed that she hardly saw the tug, which was soon far astern. It came too late with its gray hull and red band, and see-sawing on its paddles, kept on its course to find the wreck that was a wreck no longer.

And presently, the *Bon-Pêcheur*, having passed all

present danger, ran northward before the wind under full sail.

Behind her the Bay of Somme was no more than a white speck. The dunes of St. Quentin and those of Berck melted into a blue line. The heights of Etaples and the cliffs of Boulogne appeared and disappeared in their turn, then the sands of Gris-Nez and then—nothing more, nothing but the sea which, now lighted by the rays of the setting sun, soon grew dark under the shadows of night.

When she saw the Channel behind them and danger at end, Elise left the tiller to return to the fore-castle, where she could be with Firmin. The boy had recovered consciousness. He had no wound. The shock of the blow alone had upset him.

If a sailor has a little fever, he is badly off in his close and ill-ventilated quarters under deck. They are but one great room, occupied in common. Eating, drinking, and cooking go on there, and round-about gape the sleeping bunks. There is no air. Daylight comes only through the opening to the deck. The hatch serves at once as a door and a window. When the weather is bad it must be closed, and nothing can be worse than the air in that confined little place. It is flavored with fish chowder, soiled clothes, grilled onions, and tobacco smoke. Seated about on their chests, some of the sailors manage their potato soup and fish between two whiffs of a pipe, while, in the bunks, those who have the next watch are sleeping two by two.

Ordinarily at this time, one hears nothing but the

noise of eating and the snoring of the sleepers. When he is not working the sailor is little of a talker. But on this night, at each roll, a groan broke the half silence. It came from Barnabé, who had been picked up half dead, and put in the last bunk, to get well or die, as his lot might be.

Never be ill on a fishing boat. A plank without mattress or coverings makes a hard bed. Sailors have kind hearts, but it is a matter of pride with them to appear insensible to suffering of their own or of others. And for the dolorous moans of a wounded man they have no more ears than for the lamentations of an old woman. It is a tradition among them that a man should die without making a noise.

Elise felt otherwise. She was a woman, and, though fate had made her take up a man's work, she was born, like other women, to nurse and to heal. She was stirred to the bottom of her heart at each wail of the wounded man, whose condition she could imagine. They had slipped the unhappy wretch, without giving him further attention, into a bunk in which ordinarily two men slept together to keep each other warm, and there he rolled about at the caprice of the waves. The blow of the grapnel, which the skipper had dealt him, had laid his forehead open, and the pitching of the sloop kept his wound raw by grinding it against the plank.

Twenty times had Elise wished to run to his help, but Firmin's hand was in hers, and he held her fast at every attempt.

"You are not kind, Firmin. I will not be gone

long. You are molly-coddled. You have only to go to sleep. It is Barnabé's turn to be helped."

"No, he has been too hateful to you. Your helping him will not prevent his making you wretched."

But a rougher blow made the boat shake, and a more heartrending wail came from the last bunk. Elise freed her hand.

"Let me go, Firmin, I do not love you when you are selfish."

She went directly to the bunk where Barnabé lay groaning. Nothing could be seen in that dark hole. She called for help. It was Chrétien who came—Chrétien, the young blond with the pleasant voice.

"Hurry, Mam'selle Elise. It will be your watch soon, and you have not slept."

"One should think of the sick before one's self."

"If you will let me, I will take your watch. A man runs less risk."

"Thanks, Chrétien, I am not afraid of the fatigue, but I will change my watch with you from necessity. I can be useful here. Bring a light quickly."

Chrétien lighted a candle stuck in the neck of a bottle. By its gleam Elise made out the wounded man, who was rolling from side to side, his mouth open, his lips dry.

Without loss of time she set to work, heart and soul. Going to the bunk, she mopped up the blood from the boards, and hurried for her bags and bundles, which she brought to wedge Barnabé in. She improvised compresses, and made a bandage and put it on. Then she took the largest bowl, filled it with warm water and rum, and carefully

lifted it to the wounded man's mouth. At the refreshing odor he opened his eyes, sought the drink with eager lips and, his thirst quenched, fell back, throwing at Elise a long look of recognition.

At the same moment came whistling through the hatch a blast of fresh air, which whirled about the heavy vapors of the place and, passing over the candles, put them out, one after another.

"It is pleasant down here, my lads. On deck a wind to skin the devil."

And notwithstanding the darkness, Florimond, from old acquaintance with the place, went from bunk to bunk to wake the men of the next watch.

"Come! Time for the relief. It is the others' turn for the chowder."

The men shook themselves and stretched their legs. When they had groped about and found their oilskin hats, they made their way among the boxes, and went out through a new inrush of fresh air.

The others came from the deck to take their places. The hatch was shut again, the candles lighted, and Florimond, seeing Elise, clapped her roughly on the shoulder.

"You are a fine sailor! Without the help of us both, the sloop would have wallowed like a dead whale. They did not despise you then, those fellows. It was an ugly moment, all the same."

And without further words, happy in the assurance of duty done and a dinner earned, Florimond sat himself down on the chest by the side of Elise, the jug of cider between his feet and the foaming bowl on his knees. Soup tastes better when it has been well earned:



THE JUG BETWEEN HIS FEET AND THE FOAMING BOWL
ON HIS KNEES.

CHAPTER IV.

EVERYWHERE the sea, but not everywhere fish. During the five days that they had been on the grounds, a hundred land miles north of Scotland, the *Bon-Pêcheur* had spread her nets in vain. She had cast them to right and left, she had followed up boats which were on the grounds before her, but in whatever place, at whatever depth they were stretched, they had caught nothing but the worthless white-nose herring, who travel in small companies.

It was the black noses that they were after. They are the true travellers. There are millions in a single school.

The herring often reveals his presence by his peculiar odor, by his oily trail, and by his peeping and chirping, for he makes a noise like that of rain falling on water. The *Bon-Pêcheur* had neither seen nor heard anything.

Florimond was in despair. He kept the men putting out and taking in the nets without cessation. On a stretch many thousand feet long they would take nothing but a hundred white noses; those bony troublers of the nets who were not worth salting. The men became unreasonable, and showed their disappointment by their negligence and by their carelessness at work. They wished to go further

north. Perhaps the fish were belated. It would be better to go to meet them than to wait.

Florimond would not yield. They were in the latitude where the herring showed themselves every year at this time. They would see them if they kept a sharp lookout. The men were not convinced, and the longer their search proved useless, the less hesitation had they in showing their discontent.

Elise, on the other hand, displayed great zeal in backing Florimond in this fight against bad luck. She won in this way the ill-will of the crew, who accused her, without ceasing, of flattering the skipper and encouraging him in his obstinacy. First and foremost with her was duty. She would never allow Firmin to hesitate to obey an order. Often when she found him dilatory, or kicking at the sailors' taunts, she would coax him back to obedience and good humor, two things which a sailor should never lack.

When she had a chance, she looked after Barnabé. At first she had taken the time from sleep to watch him. When she was not free herself, when she was on duty, she sent Firmin to see if the wounded man needed drink or to have his wound dressed.

The lad, less forgetful of injuries, lent himself with a bad grace to these generous actions. Elise scolded him, and tried to punish him by a severe look, but she was quickly disarmed before his square face, which took on a comic pretence of being frightened at her reproof.

In fact, without Elise, Barnabé would have died

of neglect. In his overworked life the sailor cannot take care of his fellows, since he has all he can do to find time for eating and sleeping. But as Florimond said, women know how to spin out the time, and for Elise the moments seemed to stop short, so much care did she give him and so heartily. •

Barnabé knew what it cost her, for thanks to her and his strong constitution he was nearly well. He had not yet been on deck, but was about the fore-castle, which he filled with his sonorous voice. When his companions came in he seized on them and called them to witness the merits of Elise. He praised her with the same violence with which he had slandered her, never failing to exclaim that she was worth the whole crew, skipper included. He had heard them tell how she had taken the helm when they were aground, and he did not hesitate to declare to every one that without her they would have been biting the sands at the bottom of the sea.

He said so much and said it so noisily, this brawling Barnabé, that Florimond became impatient of hearing it, and was offended at seeing his authority as skipper weighed in the balance against the prestige of a young girl. They would be saying next that Elise alone had saved the boat. Child as she was, would she have been able to withstand such a blow had he not softened the shock by his play of the jigger sail, at the risk of being carried away with the canvas?

He would not acknowledge it to himself, but he was jealous at witnessing this growing reputation of a stranger on his own boat. He took care that

Elise should not be on duty when there was a chance for her to show her courage or strength. He affected to consider her a weak and feeble creature, in order to belittle her in her standing as a sailor. He spoke to her in a tone of fatherly consideration.

“You do not sulk over the work, Lise, but you have not strength for it. It is not to be expected that you should. It would be unreasonable to demand as much work from you as from the others.”

“But, Cousin Florimond, do I not work hard enough? I try to let no one see a difference.”

“I do not say no, but a strong arm cannot be had by wishing. A woman has never a man’s strength.”

Elise revolted against this undeserved censure. She turned pale and the tears rushed to her eyes, but she held them back that no one might see her trouble.

“Do you think I have been a failure through lack of strength, cousin? What will become of me, if you do not stand my friend?”

Florimond was a better man than appearances made him out. He had the highest opinion of Elise, but he did not wish it to be seen by the crew, and, embarrassed at his own injustice, he broke off his talk abruptly.

“Come, Lise! Talking is not everything, we must work. The nets must be set, it is the slack of the tide.”

The quarter of an hour of rest which the sea takes at the changing of the tide comes, in that open sea, two hours after it comes on the coast. It is the

best time for fishing, for there is no movement of the water, nothing to sweep the fish from the net.

The almanac announced the slack for that morning at nine o'clock. It was then six. It was high time to begin their preparations.

The soundings showed conditions that the herring fancy; forty fathoms of water over a bed of gravel. The breeze was favorable. Though very light, it had kept up fairly fresh since the last squall. The sea was not quite smooth, and yet had not enough swell to trouble the fish. It was after the full moon and, according to all signs, the fish ought to swim high.

Florimond took a sharp look at the weather and, having taken counsel of his experience, gave out his orders with the full force of his lungs.

"Come then, my lads, all on deck. Get the floats ready."

These floats are barrels to which the net is fastened when it is set. Around the middle of each are some ten turns of rope of a fathom's length each, and this is let out or taken up according as it is desired that the net shall lie high or low in the sea to intercept the fish. Overhauling the floats is the first thing to be done. They are brought from where they are stored, their ropes are arranged at the proper length, and they are piled up on deck to be at hand the moment they are needed.

But one would have said that the skipper had not been heard. Elise alone stepped forward. All the other hands stayed in the forecastle, silent and motionless, as if they were obeying a command.

Nevertheless the hatch was half open, and there was nothing to prevent his voice reaching those for whom it was meant. Florimond repeated his order in a rough tone. He was not more successful than before. Then he ran to the hatch, and with a blow of his foot forced it wide open. Bending over the gaping hole, and making a trumpet of his two hands, he shouted with all the strength of his lungs:

"Do you hear me, deaf ears? All on deck! Get the floats out!"

His shout resounded menacingly; the boarding of the forecastle vibrated; but the men did not move.

"Have a care! I am going for a marline-spike; I will warm your legs, if you are frozen there! Have a care! *Tonnerre!*"

Then there was a movement in the place, a noise of words rapidly interchanged in a low tone, and of steps coming from all sides. One by one, silently, mechanically, as if moved by the same thought, the men climbed the hatchway ladder and massed themselves on the deck, firm, resolute, all crying at the same time:

"There is no use in fishing here any longer. You are making us lose the season. We wish to go north."

Florimond was not the man to allow himself to be intimidated, young as he was. He was barely twenty-five, but he overawed them all by his tall figure and his powerful bearing. He had been a sailor since his earliest youth. He had a trained eye and sound judgment on everything connected

with the sea. He had the reputation of being one of the best skippers on their coast, and proud of his standing, no threats could make him flinch before a sailor. The men knew him well, and knew that he could hold his own alone against a dozen of them. He looked them over from head to foot, and said haughtily:

"You know the orders; get the floats ready. Two fathoms of rope."

"No, we will not set the nets, unless further north."

"*Tonnerre!* Get the floats, or I will take you back to port. There you can explain your reasons to the Commissaire of Marines."

The sailors looked at one another. Chrétien, the most timid, began to hesitate. The others seized him and forced him back into the ranks.

"We will duck you, if you turn traitor."

Elise stepped toward him.

"Come, Chrétien. A sailor's ear should hear the captain's orders."

He seemed bewildered. He wavered, and his glance went from his comrades to Florimond, as if demanding direction or counsel. All at once he shook his shoulders, stuck out his elbows, and throwing off the hands that tried to hold him back, ran forward to obey.

For some time Elise had been looking for Firmin. She saw him at last, sheltered behind a group of big fellows, and divined by his frowning brow and his fixed glance that he was in sympathy with the mutinous steps of his companions. With a bound

she was at his side. She took him by the shoulder and drew him away with a movement of maternal authority, at the same time vigorous and wheedling. But the little man was intoxicated by the air of insubordination which was about the deck. He struggled with all the freedom of his obstinate soul, for he did not wish any one to think him a coward. When a man is one of a crew he should share with them all that comes, good and bad alike.

Elise saw his frowns. And, though he was so amusing, in his determination to mutiny, she was troubled. She picked him up in her arms, and, pressing him to her breast to prevent his striking her, stemmed his cries, as they came from his mouth, with a kiss. Then she carried him to the very stern of the boat, where Chrétien was waiting.

"Oh, the traitors!" cried the sailors.

But, disconcerted by these gaps in their ranks, they broke apart and grumblingly set to work.

Florimond instantly recovered his paternal ways.

"I know that you are more wrinkled outside than in. Your hearts are good, if your faces are bad. Down with the jib. Furl the jigger-sail."

At a stroke, in the bows and at the stern, the sails were reefed to give room for work. The time had come to get the nets in shape.

The nets are great strips of meshes fastened together in such a way as to extend without end. A thick, strong hawser stretches their whole length, to which they are tied and by which they are lifted. Thus made fast they drop into the sea like a great partition, or rather like an open-work barrier across

the way, whose meshes are large or small according to the fish they are intended to catch. They let him pass half way through, holding him at the swelling of the belly. If he tries to back out, his scales hold him fast. Try as he may to free himself, the fish in the net is a prisoner.

And this wall of netting can be stretched for a league. It is left in the sea a longer or shorter time, according to the weather. As the breeze was soft and the sea smooth, the skipper wished to take advantage of the calm to try every chance. He ordered that all the nets should be set. It was a fortune which he was trusting to the sea.

"Come, my lads," he cried, "this time I have an idea that we shall not pull them up empty."

The day came out warm. At this season, by this hour in the morning, the sun is already high. Its rays beat as hardily as at noon. A heavy atmosphere weighed on men and things. The work seemed particularly fatiguing to the sailors on the *Bon-Pêcheur*. Setting the nets is, besides, at all times, a long and fatiguing task, which keeps the men working breathlessly for two hours. The boat moves at the speed of a knot and a half, and the nets must be all ready to be thrown over as she goes.

A part of the crew is stationed at the stern, and each man has his special task. Three or four of them draw out the nets from where they are stored, passing them from hand to hand to untangle them, and to clear, where they occur along their length at short distances, the cords which fasten them to

the hawser. Thus disentangled the nets are carried to the boatswain, who is the soul of the work.

He has no time to amuse himself—the boatswain. While the nets are drawn by him on the right, the hawser, unrolled on his left, is drawn by a cabin boy, and to this he ties the cords as fast as they appear.

He is the centre of action. But this day every one seemed lazy.

Firmin, who handled the hawser, passed it along slowly. Chrétien, who was boatswain, showed more languor than was natural. He seemed, by the slowness of his work, to wish to recover the standing which he had lost among the men, and to please his comrades he assumed their careless ways.

Florimond had at first tried to arouse their sleeping energy, but he ran against a wall of inertia, and seeing that a bad feeling was springing up, avoided any action which would bring it to a head. He had resigned himself to see the work badly done, and to say nothing.

Elise, on the other hand, was consumed with impatience. She was not one of the first set of workers, and waited on deck for the time to change shifts. Amid all this bungling it made her especially wretched to see Firmin act like the rest. In vain did she whisper in his ear encouragement, reproaches, prayers. She was depressed to find, in the lad she loved so well, such an obstinate resistance.

The hawser and the nets were payed out so much more slowly than the boat sailed, that they were dragged at the risk of tearing them. They, too, seemed impatient at the men's slowness.

Nothing could be more painful to see than this lack of accord between the sloop and the work. Excited and nervous, Elise could not restrain herself longer. She ran to Chrétien and pushed him aside.

"Go! You have no right to set an example of a bad workman."

Then she took his place.

"Come, Firmin, hurry, my little man. Quick, the boat will not wait."

And setting vigorously to work, waking up the sailors, she seized the cords as they flew past, and tied them to the hawser without stopping an instant. All her figure was alive and in action, as her hands worked. And the nets now went overboard in keeping with the boat's speed.

Then there was a *furor* of work on the deck. Everything was forgotten, the heaviness of the atmosphere, the recent discouragement, the spirit of insubordination. All were hurrying to and fro in their enthusiasm. Florimond only had a feeling of bitterness and gloom. He saw that there was a stronger power than his on the boat. He was now no more than half skipper.

CHAPTER V.

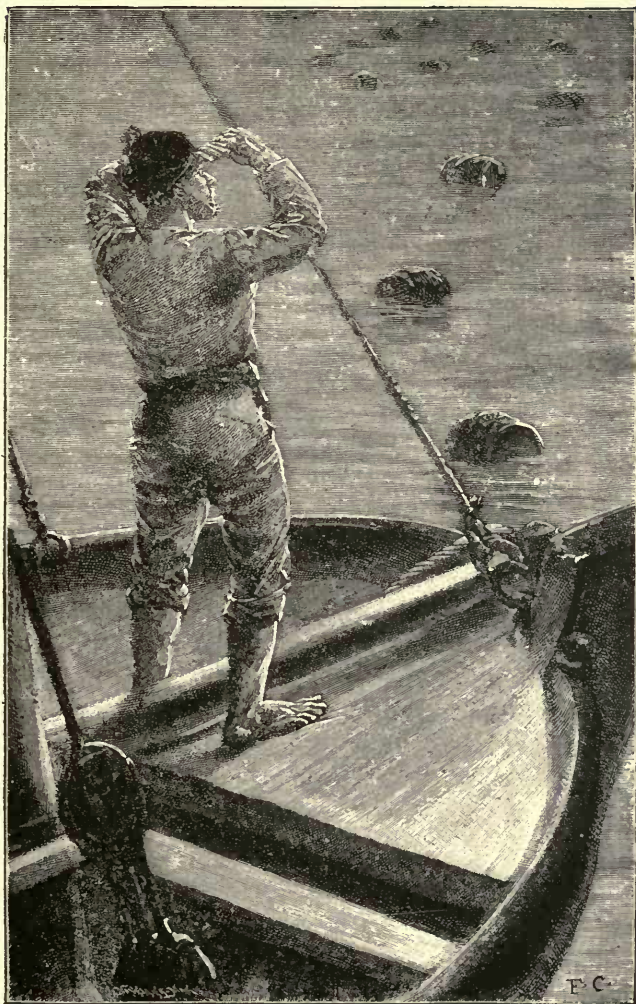
TWO whole hours the men were busily at work rigging the nets. But finally the last piece of them went overboard, taking with it the last float.

The main-sail was taken in, while the little stern-sail was spread to keep steerage way on the boat. Then the *Bon-Pêcheur* came into the wind and let herself be towed by the nets, which drifted gently in the current.

Two men were enough to watch the deck, because the fish catch themselves. The herring do the work, one has only to wait for them. The sailors sauntered back to the forecastle. It was time to eat and sleep.

But Florimond could not make up his mind to follow them without giving a last look to the fleet of casks, which seemed a line of great birds placed at equal distances like so many scouts.

All the fortune of the crew floated with the current. What a risk it was, and, after all, they might catch nothing. Florimond did not feel quite easy in his mind. Perhaps he had been wrong to be so obstinate. The herring is like the sardine. It has no fixed habits, it is here to-day and there to-morrow. Had he been really wise in reckoning on finding them where he was? But what a knock-down blow to a skipper, to be obliged to give way to



ALL THE FORTUNE OF THE CREW FLOATED WITH THE CURRENT.

his sailors! He resolved to yield, nevertheless, if the fish did not put in an appearance at once.

Full of disquiet, his frowns showed his internal struggles. As far as eye could reach he could see neither trace nor sign of fish. Not a whale, nor one of those voracious birds which follow the herring as their sure prey. Here and there other boats were fishing in the same fashion as themselves. They also had selected the same grounds. If he was deceived, others were also.

Nevertheless there was a chance that the fish were lying under those banks of light mist which, here in the North, blot out half the horizon. Above all things the fishermen hate those heavy fogs which, caused by the heat, come before the season, causing the loss of many a small boat and entangling many a net. It is an ugly piece of work to lift more than two thousand fathoms of nets at such a time.

In the North the fogs act as if malicious. Florimond, since he could not see the fish, tried to smell them, and inhaled a long breath. What was this in the air, this odor bitter-sweet, whose flavor delighted the nostrils of the man who recognized it?

A sudden thrill of joy ran through the skipper. In his blue eyes flashed sudden gleams, and his compressed lips relaxed in a broad smile. With his two hands he made a telescope to see more clearly, and to pierce the mist.

Was it not scattering? The breeze had without doubt become stronger, and was driving the mist before it like a light smoke. The surface of the sea was clear. Everything became distinct as he

looked—the color of the sea, the density of the wave. There lay the oily proof of the herrings' presence. Florimond could see the thick scum whose brackish odor he had smelled. Had he not been right? The school of black noses was here, and this was the right place to spread the nets.

In two bounds he was at the forecandle hatch, and with all his strength he made it resound with the joyful shout:

“All on deck—a herring scum!”

Filled with delight, and drawn by this cry of victory, the men dropped their food, rushing and overturning one another at the ladder, and holding fast with feet, with knees, with hands. All nostrils were distended, all eyes turned in the direction the skipper pointed.

“Was I not right, my lads? Here they are, the black noses, always faithful to their rendezvous. But they are swimming low. It is not hard to understand why, with the half breeze one makes out below there in this last quarter of the moon. The nets are not low enough. Let out three fathoms.”

The sloop's boat was instantly dropped into the sea. Four sailors slipped down a rope into her: two big fellows to row, Chrétien to steer, an old hand to let out the ropes.

“Get on board, boy.” It was Firmin they called. He was wanted to aid in the work, and disappeared over the side in his turn.

Elise tried to follow him. She slid down the rope but the canoe had already its full force. One more would have been in the way.

"Keep back, Lison, you can go next time. Have no fear; we will take good care of your Firmin."

Elise was not at all satisfied. The little fellow was so headstrong that, when she did not have him at her side, she was like a mother in distress. Hanging on the rope, she called out:

"Chrétien, let me take the helm. It will give you time to finish your meal and to sleep an hour."

Too late. The oars cut the water, and they were already at the nearest cask. Firmin quickly let out three fathoms of rope and then the boat went on from cask to cask while Elise watched it, as it flew along lifted softly by the swell.

She was still clinging to her rope, swinging over the water, and in her sadness of heart had hardly thought of herself.

"Lise, what are you after? Do you want to swim along with them? Your Firmin is lost for a couple of hours only."

Then reaching down over the side, hauling at the same time on the rope, and lifting Elise, Florimond raised the young girl to the deck. Hardly was she on her feet when she hurried to the gunwale, continuing to follow the boat with eyes anxious and tender.

"Eh, Lise, it is not healthy in our trade to have a heart so at the mercy of the wave. Why do you look in that direction? It is much better on the other side." And with his arm stretched toward the North, Florimond showed her the oily scum which lay thick on the surface of the water over a space of many miles.

"What a puddle! Have you ever seen it promise as well?"

He drew Elise forward where she would catch the wind from the scum, and wished her to smell the odor. She distended her nostrils in nervous efforts, as if she was going to inhale all at once these riches which the sea offered.

"There is more than one mess of fish there. It is a shame that they lie so low. They will not travel at all to-day, at least unless they change their mind after noon. These hunters after adventure are governed only by whims. I do not know what they have seen to make them lie at the bottom. See how the birds dive after them."

A flight of gray birds specked the sky like a sombre cloud, but to learn anything from their behavior needed the eye of a sailor, an eye accustomed to grasp, in all the completeness of detail, things most distant and most fugitive.

Florimond had seen clearly these hungry birds, and it was from them that he knew to what length to drop his net. Flying to a great height and then closing their wings, they let themselves drop headlong with all their weight, so as to dive to the bottom of the sea. It is their fashion of catching the fish when he swims low.

Elise was not at all interested in their doings. Fixed in one spot she watched the changes in the horizon, which now appeared as a straight line, now disappeared softly behind thin and formless vapors. There was a rapid and continuous play as the wind chased, with all swiftness, the gray and transparent

mist. Then the changing fog formed cliffs, and all at once, breaking out from the circle which bound it, spread like a thick white cloud. The breath of the North congealed into a heavy fog as it left his mighty lungs.

It seemed like the unfolding of a mighty winding-sheet, ready to bury under its thick woof the infinite expanse of heaven and sea. As if she already felt the cold enveloping her, Elise shivered :

"Quick, Cousin Florimond, quick, quick; see the fog! I will blow the horn for the boat. How will they be able to find their way back?"

"They will grope from cask to cask. There are old hands on board; I have no fear for them."

"All the same, I would like better to be with Firmin. I will blow the horn. I have an idea that he will recognize my voice."

While the young girl ran to the fore-castle to get the horn Florimond, half stupefied, watched the approach of this white cloud, which immediately enveloped, in a mournful silence, the school of herring, the sea, the boats, and the men.

The clamorous birds gave hoarse cries as they flew to and fro, but already the fog hid them from sight. Florimond threw a last glance at the scum, which was disappearing like a fortune snatched away as soon as seen. He saw at the same time the neighboring fishing-boats, which were making haste to take up their nets. Then, close at hand, tacking about, a *flambart*, which, in its movements to and fro, had less the air of a regular fisherman than of a coaster pressed into the service. Decid-

edly this *flambart* acted suspiciously. During the last half hour it had sailed from one boat to another, and had run along the length of the nets. Its outlines blended into an uncertain mass through the puffs of fog which commenced to surround it. It seemed to broaden, to rise in height, to enormously increase in size, and then to vanish like a phantom of darkness.

Then the veil of fog reached the *Bon-Pêcheur*, and she was suddenly enveloped with a white night damp, cold and penetrating. Florimond stroked his beard, which was already dripping with wet. He breathed into the dampness to judge of its thickness and resistance, and lowered his glance in order to see exactly how nearly objects close at hand were obscured.

"It is too heavy to last," he said. "There will be no risk in leaving the nets in the water."

At this moment, from the bow of the sloop was heard a musical note, a long blast followed by two slower ones. It seemed as if the name *Bon-Pêcheur* had been called out in two plaintive words in the midst of those stifling surroundings.

Elise was blowing the trumpet with all her might in the direction of the small boat. And when her breath gave out and she stopped to rest, she raised her black eyes and tried to pierce the white cloud, in the hope of being able to discover the dear form for which she was waiting. Then she listened, motionless, thinking that she heard the noise of the oars.

Could they not hear then, the men in the small

boat: Firmin, Chrétien, the two big fellows, and the old sailor? Elise blew again. She put all her strength into a far-reaching blast. A heavy sound came back. Could it be an echo from this ocean of fog? It came from another fisherman; their signals crossed. Could they have out a boat also?

Then a figure came out of the fog beside Elise, and suddenly, and almost with rudeness, said:

"Elise, give me the trumpet. It is not a tool for weak chests. You only empty your lungs without making your comrades hear."

And with a blast that made the deck tremble, Florimond blew into it. His chest was hollowed in by the effort. One would have said the winding-sheet of fog was torn asunder. Two other, three other, horns answered by blasts nearly as sonorous.

"You can hear more plainly. It is the end of the trouble. Elise, you will soon see your Firmin again."

But the lull was deceptive. Hardly had the fog lifted when it settled down again, more thick and more damp than before.

For an hour, while the men in the fore-castle took advantage of their enforced idleness to drink, Florimond made the air resound with his long blasts, but he only exhausted himself uselessly in these desperate appeals. The men in the boat, Firmin, Chrétien, the two big fellows, and the old sailor did not return. Silently, leaning over the gloomy abyss, Elise looked and listened, listened and looked. Alas! The men in the canoe did not return.

CHAPTER VI.

THE *flambart* which Florimond had seen to leeward of the *Bon-Pêcheur* was not a coaster. It was a boat from some port of Escaut in search of herring, but it was manned by one of those mongrel crews, who are less anxious to live by their own work than by stealing.

The skipper, an old pirate who had sailed to the four quarters of the world, did not lack boldness nor skill. He had a quick eye, could read the weather better than any one, and managed his boat with singular dexterity. No one knew as well as he how to take up his neighbor's nets during the night, shake out the sparkling fish into his bins, and return the nets empty to the sea. When he did not find the fish sufficient booty, he did not hesitate to keep nets also, from which he cut off enormous pieces.

Like the porpoise he was most active in bad weather, and to assist his thieving, profited by all the treachery of the sea. As soon as he saw the fog coming, he tacked about in such a fashion that, at the moment of his disappearance in the mist, he should be lying to at the further end of the *Bon-Pêcheur's* nets.

At this very moment the small boat came alongside the float next to the last. The four sailors and the boy had finished their work of overhauling,

without any suspicion of the danger which was coming down from the north upon them. They had seen the *flambart* and had kept an eye on it, without suspecting it of evil intentions. But, the moment they were imprisoned in the fog, all five of them alike had an intuition of the truth, and laid their heads together.

They could no longer make out the smallest object, for everything was blotted from sight. Their hollow voices took on a strange resonance in this thick mist, but their eyes and ears became quickly accustomed to its unreality, and their discussion was as much to the point, as animated and as terse, as if in full sunlight.

Was it necessary to remain there on guard against the thief? They would risk being crushed under the bow of the *flambart*. Delay itself in the midst of such a fog would be dangerous. The two big fellows opposed with all their might any such step. They did not own any share in the nets, but had leased theirs for the season. Consequently, they had less interest in defending them.

Chrétien, always good-natured, yielded; but Firmin would not. His nets and those of his sister were there. He would not allow a single mesh to be stolen, if he had to mount guard all alone astride of a float.

The old sailor owned nets, and he, too, held that the boat should remain on guard. The fog would probably lessen. Fogs like this, at the end of June, passed in whiffs, like a puff of tobacco smoke.

All five of them heard the blasts of horns blown

to guide them back, but these notes of alarm reached them from the four quarters of the horizon. In which direction should they go? By listening intently they made out in the line of the nets a note far distant and rhythmic; one would have said that it was the name of the *Bon-Pêcheur* which the fog repeated.

"Turn, Chrétien!" and the big fellows dug their oars into the water.

"No!" and the old sailor and Firmin clung desperately to the cask.

Chrétien hesitated between the two, but the calls of the *Bon-Pêcheur* became more frequent, more plaintive, more pressing.

"Chrétien, bring the boat around, or we will strike"; and standing up the two big fellows lifted their oars ready for a blow. Chrétien, easily persuaded, shifted the helm. The old sailor let go of the cask, but Firmin clung tightly and the boat, dragged by one party, held back by another, oscillated furiously.

"Let go, boy, do you want to upset us?"

But the angry boy clung fast. "Let go!" To drag him away they gave a long pull on the oars. But they were twitched back so vigorously that the rowers tumbled off their seats. Then, in the confusion, the boat floated loose.

"Stop! Misery and bad luck! we have lost the nets. Steer to starboard! No! Listen! The horn of the *Bon-Pêcheur* is to larboard. It has a tender sound; one would believe that Lison was blowing it for her boy. What do you say, boy, is it

your sister who is blowing? What has become of Firmin? He is gone overboard. *Parbleu!* It was he who upset us just now. Poor boy! He was too obstinate. He is drowned, for if he had been able to cling to the barrel he would have surely heard us."

He heard them truly, but he did not answer. It was the caprice of a child, the whim of an obstinate little mule.

Let them go, and good luck to them! So much the better if they are lost. It will punish them for having been cowards. And while the four sailors lost themselves in the fog he floated astride of his cask, as serious as a *gendarme* on his horse.

They were well advised, those fellows who decided to run away! As if a man ought to abandon his goods to thieves! It took hard enough work to earn them in the first place. Elise would be satisfied with him, and thinking of his sister, Firmin was proud of himself.

All the same, it was hard work to cling astride his barrel. He had the air of a toad who slips along a stone too round for him. But when one makes up one's mind to do a thing, one can do it. In high spirits he set himself straight in his saddle, bending backward and forward to imitate the gallop of a horse. The barrel dipped and rose softly, as if it were swaying beneath him as it ran.

"Hoop-la, hoop-la! The beast has blood, he answers to the spur!"

Two long hours passed, and, lost in this annihilation of everything, Firmin became weary. He

floated dejectedly now with the current, and watched the sun climb the heavens, marking its position by a shaft of wan light through the mist. How slowly he climbed, this pale sun! He was nearly overhead, but his rays had not burned off the thick vapor. The fog would go only with the day.

Nothing could be so gloomy as the silence. It was broken only by blasts of horns at longer and longer intervals, farther and farther away. Once in a while there was a furtive splashing, a rapid swirl of the water; it was a passing porpoise, a porpoise good-natured and full of play. He swam at the very surface of the sea, letting his fin show above it. He stopped long enough to turn his foolish somersaults and to stare, his black eyes twinkling with merriment and mischief. But he could not wait to laugh. He was far away in no time. Not a bird flew near; everything was in mourning under this winding-sheet of fog.

Distress and exhaustion came together. In water up to his knees, and drenched by the mist, Firmin was worn out both in spirit and body. The white night seemed to penetrate his heart. He looked, he listened: but there was nothing except this silent whiteness without form and without limit. His startled eyes looked for dangers which he could not see. He was frightened at noises which he did not hear. Heedless of the fish, which began to move as if to announce the end of the fog, he stared fixedly before him into the silent blank which had swallowed all the energies of his being.



THE WHITE NIGHT SEEMED TO PENETRATE HIS HEART.

Utterly worn out, his teeth chattering, gasping, he calls Elise, who, alas, cannot hear him. His clenched fingers dig themselves into the staves of the barrel. Elise! Why did she not come to the rescue of her fainting brother? In a convulsion of terror he lost his balance and his barrel overturned, throwing him into the sea. Elise! Elise! the boy you love so much is drowning, he cannot hold on longer, he is sinking!

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Where was he? Roused by an unlucky blow and the noise of splintering wood, he came to himself under a pile of nets, half suffocated and nearly drowned beneath the dripping mass. Everything came back to his mind, but indistinctly. He had fallen from his cask, his strength gone, all hope abandoned, when the sound of the nets being raised had given him fresh courage. The hawser had been drawn tight, bringing the nets right under his hands. He clung to it desperately, he kept fast hold in its rapid rise, and when he saw the boat at hand, braced himself with his feet so as not to be crushed or scraped against its side. With the nets he had fallen on the deck, but then all his strength was gone, and he did not know even how he had got there.

Then his brain became clearer. It seemed to him that the fog was less dense. Through the entangling net-work which surrounded him he saw figures, but they were not his own countrymen; their hair was too blond, their eyes too light. Then he remembered the *flambart* and his suspicion of her.

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Strange figures passed him with savage gestures, armed with gaffs, with capstan-bars, with oars, with grapnels. Where were they hurrying, and what meant their strange shouts and this unaccountable outcry?

In the midst of this uproar in a strange tongue, Firmin heard the sound of voices which he knew; the sonorous call of Florimond, the hoarse shouts of the sailors. Then came the noise of grapnels clutching the bulwarks.

Then at intervals the clear voice of Elise:

"This way! Alongside! Cousin Florimond, they have perhaps stolen our men with our nets."

Then a tumult of blows. Under the pile of nets Firmin struggled like a cat who tries to get out of a snare. He was wild to rejoin Elise, to share with her the risks of the fight, because he knew that what he heard was a fight between the sloop and the *flambart*.

Florimond had ended by being afraid of this fog which did not disperse at noon. He knew that sometimes such fogs lasted all day, and that they were followed by wind. Then, bad luck to nets surprised by heavy weather at the approach of night. His anxiety for the small boat had increased also. He supposed it moored to some float, but as it did not come back he planned to anticipate its return by taking up the nets. And on the *Bon-Pêcheur* the capstan smoked, so rapidly did it work. It turned furiously. The men untied the nets in feverish haste, two taking the place everywhere of one in the

impatience which each felt to save his share of the nets from an unknown danger. Suddenly the machine gave a twitch as if the weights which it was raising had doubled. Florimond, supposing at first that he must be lifting the boat which was fast to the float, rushed to the bow to shout an alarm through the fog, but he recoiled in the face of an apparition.

It was a giant craft whose masts, seen through the mist, appeared to touch the sky. It had a strange and fantastic appearance, but its outline soon became clear and distinct to him. The noise of work was heard, the whirling of another machine, the groaning of another capstan, the cries of men in Flemish *patois*. It was the *flambart* which from the other end was taking up his nets. Pack of pirates! . . . *Tonnerre!*

They were going to strike bow to bow. With a grinding that made the boat shiver the hawser parted, lashing the water furiously like the blow of a whip. The next instant there was a crash as the boats met. Both bowsprits snapped short off, the bows were staved in, timbers cracked, every joint creaked. Sloop and *flambart* cried aloud together under the violence of the collision. Then locked together, foot to foot, axe to axe, they fought for the nets.

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Firmin worked without stopping to get free from his meshy prison. His fingers were entangled, his legs and arms held fast. The more he struggled the more firmly he was held in this intricate mass.

He heard the fight grow more noisy and more bitter, taunts were hurled back and forth, there was the sounds of blows, the cries of the wounded.

Death and ill-fortune! Why had he not thought of his knife while he was working there vainly like a fly in a spider's net. He was not long in opening a way, in cutting for himself a door in the thick mass of cordage. He was on his feet. What light was this? The fog had gone of a sudden. He saw the *Bon-Pêcheur*. He darted forward. "Elise! Elise!"

Too late! The two boats had separated. From the bulwarks of the *flambart* the grapnels, cut off by hatchets, hung like dead claws, and the sailors with the blond faces shoved away with oars and gaffs the sloop which fell off wounded and gasping.

"Elise! Elise!" Firmin had seen his sister, who stretched out her arms to him.

"Jump overboard, child! I will throw a buoy."

Without hesitation he sprang on the bulwarks, but rough hands struck him back harshly to the deck.

"Elise! Elise!" Too late! The two boats had hoisted their sails and in the now clear air were under way, without pity for the two beings that they were tearing asunder.

CHAPTER VII.

SLOOP and *flambart* set out each for its own port to repair damages.

After the collision Florimond had examined into the state of his boat, and had judged it such as to make speedy repairs a necessity. The *Bon-Pêcheur* was injured in her dead works only, but she had lost her figure head, carried away by the same blow as the bowsprit, and her cut-water was stove. Moreover the tearing of her planking to starboard threatened to let in the water, and with her timbers started in the bow she could not have borne a heavy head sea.

Temporary repairs were promptly made. The wound in the planking was dressed within by a solid facing of board and without was staunched with a compress. A great piece of sail was smeared with a thick coating of a waterproof dressing made of tow, tar, and tallow, and this was then spread like a great plaster over the injured place.

The cracks in the cut-water disappeared under a sheathing tightly nailed, and finally the only extra mast which the boat owned, a mizzen mast, was made to do duty as a bowsprit. It weighed a little heavily on the bow, already too weak, and made the boat pitch violently, straining her in her seams.

There was no doubt that it would have been wise

to put into some Scotch roadstead, but Florimond preferred to run all risks and try to make his own port. Nothing is more hateful to a sailor than an enforced stay on land, and a detention of this kind appears to him more annoying and more irksome than ever in a strange country.

Florimond, besides, was impatient to begin legal proceedings before the maritime authorities. He had seen enough of the *flambart* to enable him to identify her, and had no need of further evidence to prove his charges and obtain speedy damages for his injuries.

He was not troubled at all as to Firmin. Pirates of the North Sea are pillagers and stealers of nets, but they do not eat men, and if they kept the boy it was more from a fear of seeing him drown than from a desire to hurt him. Surprised at being identified in the sudden lifting of the fog, they would not have wished to add to their misdeeds the chances of a death which would weigh heavily in the balance with their judges.

There remained the canoe. As to this Florimond was more troubled. He tried in vain to imagine how the four men had become separated from Firmin, and what direction they had taken. If his sloop had not been damaged he would have recovered the boy in order to find out; but he had been too much troubled in the confusion of the unexpected collision to think of saving anything beyond his crew and his boat.

The *Bon-Pêcheur* sailed south, while the *flambart* fled eastward. Elise followed with an inert glance

the strange craft which was carrying away the only being for whom she cared to live. Then her first feeling of stupor gave way, and she regained her self-control.

The *flambart* was not yet more than two cable lengths distant.

It had not taken the wind, and it would be child's play to overtake her. As she watched her, still so close at hand, a distant cry made her start. Her child, the boy whom she loved, whom she had always loved, was struggling not to be carried away.

Stirred in every fibre of her being she drew herself up, resolute and strong to defend the rights of outraged affection. Running to the helm where Florimond was, she seized it with her two hands as if to bring the boat about.

"Tack, cousin, I must get my boy."

"You are a fool, Elise. We shall have heavy enough work as it is, if the weather does not favor us."

"I do not care, I wish my boy."

"Then go and get him alone, the boat shall not carry you."

"Oh, cousin! I beseech you. It will take less than half an hour."

"The wind would not take as much time as that to throw us on our beam-ends."

"Cousin, I promise you to be quick. We need not come alongside, the boy shall jump overboard. I will make myself fast to a rope and pick him up."

"Elise, be quiet. I have not even five minutes to lose. The slightest squall would stave in our sides.

"I shall not have a moment's peace until we have reached port."

"Cousin Florimond, it is killing me to know that my Firmin is among those pirates."

"Why do you let your imagination run away with you? Do you not know that they will send him back by the first boat? Is it not the custom?"

"Cousin, cousin, hurry! The *flamart* is off."

"Elise, let go! I will not risk everything for your wretched brother. Let go!"

Elise did not let go of the helm. One would have said that, holding herself thus fast to the soul of the boat, she imagined that she could persuade it to stop and act as she wished.

But Florimond's patience was exhausted at her persistence. She raised to him her great black eyes, firm and beseeching, and he was not able to bear the trouble which he saw in them.

"Away there! *Tonnerre!* Away there, Elise! Do you think you are captain now because the sailors have flattered you in order to annoy me? Have you ever known me suffer another master than myself on my boat? Away, there!"

He raised his voice, that the men of the crew, who pressed around them, interested in the dispute, could hear clearly.

There was not one who did not approve the skipper's prudence. At the first seam which shows itself in the side of his floating house the sailor loses confidence, and with that his resolution. When one has nothing between one's self and death but a wooden box, it is especially necessary that

there should be no cracks in the planking. The men remained silent, not able to forget the state of affairs and to take sides. Nevertheless there was an evident sympathy for Elise, a frank admiration for her feeling and her bravery. They experienced a mysterious respect for this creature, so strong in the weakness of her sex; for this young girl, vigorous and gentle, whose courage was sure and whose heart was kind. She had shown against danger a resolution which never failed, against injury a pity which nothing discouraged. She had won them over by the strength of her heroic youth, and they gave her their full support and confidence.

Before her they did not dare to be ill-natured, or to let her see their rough ways. They were eager to show their skill and courage, to run without hesitation in heavy weather along the gunwale, to walk erect on the bowsprit, and to play like monkeys in the rigging. Each showed his best side and, through the force of example, Elise was the cause of an increased discipline.

All this was to Florimond a cause of jealousy and continual ill-feeling. The more this strange influence on his boat increased, the less was he able to stand it. He suffered from envy and mortification, and these make even kind hearts unjust.

In fact he regretted already that he had not managed by prompt action to rescue Firmin. In his inmost conscience he reproached himself for his hardness; but, wounded in his vanity, he would rather have died at the helm than have changed his

first refusal, and so have seemed to yield to the ascendancy of Elise.

At this moment Barnabé came on deck, hardly yet well, but drawn thither by the excitement of recent events. He waddled pompously forward. Under the bandages and rags in which ha'f his head was tied up, his round nose, his little alert eye, and his black moustache gave him quite a military swagger. He immediately took a hand in the discussion, with his customary arrogant tone. He did not know the cause of the dispute, but he was not accustomed to being embarrassed by any such trifle as that, and his only thought was to be revenged on Florimond.

Being the last to arrive he found himself, as he was a short man, out of sight behind the tall figures of his comrades. He saw that his voice could not be heard. Jumping upward he caught a rope, climbed it, and hung fast to it like a cat, and then, as much at his ease as an orator in his pulpit, delivered his harangue. He spoke as brawlers everywhere do, for the pleasure of hearing his own voice, and without realizing that, in these first moments of uneasiness, his audience did not care in the least for his twaddle.

"Hold your tongue, Barnabé," cried the skipper. "We don't want to hear you; one has better things to do than to listen to the squalling of a fool, when one fears a storm."

"Does the truth then trouble you? If you wish to injure Lison, it is because you are jealous. She is worth more than you."

This apostrophe had no connection with the sub-

ject of debate, but it agreed very well with the real feeling of the sailors. They all smiled grimly as they looked at Florimond, who turned the tables by saying:

"There is no time for laughing, pack of simpletons. Do you remember that our bow is as cracked as Barnabé's head?"

With the weak vacillation of the ignorant they lost their smiles instantly, but the landsman was not vanquished:

"If Lison had had charge of the boat, it would not have been injured."

"Be quiet, Barnabé," cried Elise, "we are wasting valuable time in foolish talk. My brother Firmin is carried off on the *flambart*. I want to go after him."

"Of course! We must tack," shouted Barnabé.

He waited for the effect of this demand. But the sailors did not move, held back this time by the fury of the skipper, who cried in a rage:

"Hold your tongue! Do you wish the boat to be lost on account of this wretched girl? Is it not enough that we have lost our season through her? Since she has been on board we have had nothing but bad luck."

He pushed Elise roughly from the helm. Overcome by the cruelty of fate she burst into a torrent of tears. From her black eyes, swimming in sadness, the bitter drops gushed hot and tumultuous, as though the source of bitterness and woe was inexhaustible. Her chest heaved under her distressing sobs, and a feeling of rude sadness, of

instinctive pity seized all the men at the sight of her grief and misery.

"Shall we abandon her in her trouble?" shouted Barnabé. "We must tack! It is only cowards who make women weep. Come on! Seize the tiller!"

The group of sailors was stirred by an involuntary thrill. Florimond feared the unchaining of the tempest, if he were not firm. With his strong hand he snatched the tiller from its socket, and raised it with all the strength of his mighty arm.

"*Tonnerre!* Here it is! Who wants the tiller? who wants it?"

He made it whirl about him threateningly. All the men recoiled instinctively, and slipping down his rope Barnabé cunningly took shelter behind his companions.

"Who wants it? *Tonnerre!*"

No one, evidently, was anxious for it, for no man moved.

At this moment the sloop gave a plaintive groan, a yawning of her plastered seams.

"Do you hear how she wheezes in the chest? She breathes hard. Hoist the top-sail!"

It was done. When she saw the sloop with all sails spread, Elise felt that her last hope was gone. Quickly, through the veil of her tears, she turned her eyes toward the *flambart*, which was disappearing on the eastern horizon, and, with lacerated feelings and bleeding heart, abandoned herself to the depths of her sorrow.

For four days and four nights the *Bon-Pêcheur* ran

at the same speed without shifting a sail. In one straight flight she passed through the North Sea, entered the straits of Calais, and found herself again in the familiar waters of the English Channel.

But with her change of sea, she had a change of wind. These sudden changes are very common in these waters. One would have said that the breeze was angry at the impatience of the *Bon-Pêcheur*, and that it changed in order to hinder her presumptuous flight.

If she could only get under way! For an hour her large hull had ceased to slip proudly through the waves, and was tossing a little heavily. There was a risk of opening her wound. If she could only get under way! Yonder in the wind's eye, a squall was brewing. In advance of the great clouds, which rolled in gray whirls, rose a broad band of sombre yellow, like a cliff of wind and rain. They are not at all pleasant to meet, these briny coast squalls, behind each one of which hide twenty others, ready to follow in wild, endless uproar.

The band of yellow spread. It covered half the sky, and its outlines reached the zenith. It drew near, driven by a furious wind, and borne on a rushing wave, like a moving wall of water, ready to crash down. In a quarter of an hour it covered the whole heavens, while before it ran three waves, avant-couriers, who preceded it for some minutes, as if to announce the tempest.

If the *Bon-Pêcheur* had only not lost so much time. It had hardly taken in any sail, it was as full of bravado as if it wished to meet the squall, and be

driven along by it. It was approaching its port. Already had it passed the sands of Gris-Nez and the chalky rocks of Boulogne, it had seen again the light-house of Etaples, it had heard the buoy which whistles on the shoals of Berck, and the buoy of the Vergoyer. There the sea is the shallowest in those waters. The bottom lies little over twenty feet below the surface. The surf foams and breaks as strongly as on the coast. It is heavy enough to capsize any boat.

It was toward this spot that the north-east wind, which had held for the last hour, was blowing. If it should suddenly get the *Bon-Pêcheur* in its clutch, it would drive her to this Vergoyer, whence escape was impossible. Never can it be known how many men and boats have been engulfed by these eddies, hardly three thousand feet wide. At its very name Elise had a shiver of fright. For it was this accursed Vergoyer which had made her an orphan, and which still kept jealously the bodies of her father and his six companions, refusing to deliver them up to the land they loved so well.

Florimond was at the helm. For four days he had hardly left it. Less than ever in the hour of peril would he entrust to other hands the fortunes of his boat. With his steady eye, and that skill in handling her which never forsook him, he had fought the *Bon-Pêcheur* against the treacherous sea; refusing all rest, having his meals brought to him, and eating with one hand while he steered with the other. In this half week he had not slept five hours. His cheeks were burning with fever, and his clear eyes

were dimmed and seemed sunk deep into his head.

It was because he knew and feared this sea, which was so quickly angry; this sea which supports life, but which also destroys it.

CHAPTER VIII.

FLORIMOND'S only hope was that the storm would be slight, for sometimes, threatening as they seem, these squalls have little force, and are soon over. He awaited impatiently the three waves which preceded it, in order to judge of the strength of those in their wake.

These three waves are often followed by a lull. There is generally a space of five minutes between the first alarm and the arrival of the wind; five minutes, which a good sailor utilizes in getting his ship ready to meet it.

What should he do? Should he keep the wind astern and run before it with all speed in the direction of his harbor? It was a hundred chances to one that he would strike on the Vergoyer.

Was there any other means of safety that he could try? Should he close reef her? Was not that still more risky?

When a boat is close reefed, she renders the tempest harmless by offering it no resistance. The sea has a malicious pleasure in hurling masses of water against an object which opposes it. So the boat uses a kind of strategy. She appears to be at the mercy of the waves, but all the while keeps a sharp watch against the rude play of her adversary. All sail is struck, so as to give the wind no hold except

on the hull, and as the boat drifts, she forms with her hull a large wake, flat and solid, which resists the violence of the waves, stops them, and knocks them down, so that they die out on it.

The *Bon-Pêcheur* was an old hand at this kind of work, and expert at it. It is usually so with good sailors ; so that had she not been injured, Florimond would not have dreaded the squall in the least. He would have let his boat drift, and would have brought up at Treport or perhaps at Dieppe ; but she was injured in precisely the parts which would be most under strain.

Only two sails are used ; in the bow the stay-sail, and in the stern a little leg-of-mutton, which takes the place of the jigger-sail. In this way the two ends of the boat, which alone carry sail, feel the force of the wind. Consequently they must be very strong. Would the *Bon-Pêcheur*, wounded as she was, have strength to resist such a strain ?

It seemed then to Florimond that to drift would end almost certainly in the boat's breaking up. He was still hesitating when the three waves arrived, foaming and roaring, and swept the deck from end to end.

In order to withstand the shock, which he foresaw was to be tremendous, he had braced himself, with legs far apart ; but the first sea lifted him off his feet, picked him up, shook him, knocked him senseless, and rolled him over and over, leaving him unconscious on the deck. The second wave would have carried him overboard, had not two sailors seized him just in time, and dropped him into a

place of safety, through the open hatch by the capstan.

The three waves swept by in a fury of foam, showing that the wind was to be tremendous. They must act or die.

Who should take the helm?

"Lison—Lison!"

As with one voice the sailors called for the girl, showing involuntarily how they depended on her for their lives. It was a perilous honor which they forced upon her.

Injured in her dead works already, and full of water, the sloop quivered under the blows of the waves, while at this very moment she was close to the dangers of the shoals, with their shifting currents of eddying sand.

Elise did not hesitate. In her instinctive terror of the Vergoyer, she had but one thought—that was to fly from it, to shun, cost what it might, the place to which the wind was furiously hurrying them. Had it not already had enough victims, this gulf of the dead, that one should offer one's self as a fresh sacrifice, with the certainty of not escaping?

Elise, by close reefing the boat, hoped to reach the pier at Treport. There was on the coast to the south-west a bad channel to pass through, down toward the black buoy, but they would do their best when they came to it. Between two dangerous courses ought not one to choose the less?

Without hesitation, without even surprise at their choosing her, she ran to the helm and quickly made

herself fast to the end of a rope, so as not to be swept over by the enormous seas that were to come. She gave out her orders:

"Furl the jib and the main-sail! Rig the leg-of-mutton!"

She ordered ropes stretched at once from the mast to the gunwale, for the men to hold to. She assigned them their posts. Four sailors to the pumps, two to the lookout on the bow. Everything was ready when the first blast came, with furious waves heaped up on one another, as if to drown them under the deluge of foam and spray. The deck was under water from one end to the other. Quantities of it ran into the open hatchways. How had it happened that they could have forgotten to shut these mouths of the ship? Through them she was drinking enough water to sink her.

"Close the hatches! Nail them fast!" The covers were clapped on, and, in order that they should not yield to a sudden strain and open of themselves, were made secure by heavy blows of hammer and nails.

It was time. Great sweeping seas came aboard. Furious at finding the hatches closed, they crashed against the bulwarks, and ran off slowly through the scuppers.

All was ready. Heaven help them! Elise stood erect, conscious of her responsibility. Near her a sailor called out when the heaviest seas were going to break. She turned her back to them, bracing herself firmly, disappearing in the whirls of foam, but always reappearing on her feet, energetic and unconquerable.

Soon the blasts of the tempest were in mad chase, as if striving to see which could lash the hardest and most furiously.

With quivering plunges, with creakings and strainings, the *Bon-Pêcheur* fell away across the shoals. Sometimes the waves were swifter than she, and swept by her; then, striking her on the stern, they drove her violently forward. Her bow groaned dolorously, the pumps clanked unceasingly, while the lookout shouted:

"To larboard a bell buoy!"

It was the buoy anchored on the shoals of Somme.

"To starboard a black buoy!"

The *Bon-Pêcheur* entered the channel. This was a perilous spot, but Elise did not fear it any more than the shoal the bell buoy marked. Through these waters, so treacherous on account of their shifting sands, she had sailed with her father often enough to know all the dangers, and to shun them with the confidence of an old pilot.

Immovable and firm, she managed the helm rather with her nerves than with her muscles. Heavy as it seemed for her, she held it against the seas, and by a continual go and come of the tiller forced the boat's head in such a way as to spare the bow, making the stern bear the brunt of the shocks. Now stumblingly, now with a rush forward, the *Bon-Pêcheur* went on her crooked course, and buoys and beacons went by her as fast as if they were themselves running in an opposite direction.

Hurrah! They see at last the light-house of Tre-



NEAR HER, A SAILOR CALLED OUT WHEN THE HEAVIEST SEAS
WERE GOING TO BREAK.

port, which yonder to leeward stands out clear above the sombre cliffs, white as the emblem of hope. Courage! the wave is heavy, but the danger of the shoals is over. Before a half hour the *Bon-Pêcheur* will be at the pier.

Alas, the wind stiffens! The heavens are black, the sea is black, the foam alone is white. The waves strike her more furiously. One of them, angry and irresistible, has nearly engulfed her in its whirling mass. She is entirely lost to sight. For twenty seconds there is no sign of her. Then she shakes herself free, but with a fresh rent in her bow. A little more, and she would have gone down forever. Heaven help them!

"Turn out a reef of the main-sail, two reefs of the jib!"

What are you thinking of, Elise! more sail to a wind so furious that it already nearly tears away the little that the boat is carrying. The *Bon-Pêcheur* flies like a bird of the tempest. In less than a quarter of an hour she is just under the light-house. Courage! Alas! The cut-water opens, and the bow settles, until the deck is on a level with the sea. Are they to go down so near port? Heaven help them!

"Hoist the jib and the stay-sail!"

More sail still? It seems madness. The jib is hardly hoisted before it is torn away, dragging with it the makeshift bowsprit.

Its rags and the timber thrash about, threatening to destroy everything. Death and misery! The *Bon-Pêcheur* digs her nose under water.

"Hoist the main-sail!"

It is a fearful task. Heaven help them! But while the boat floats there is hope. The sailors watch for a lull in the wind, and suddenly the sail hangs out in the teeth of the gale. The bow is full of water, but lifted by the pressure of the wind against the sail it rises again.

Courage! The light-house is close at hand. How the boat rolls and pitches! But now the *Bon-Pêcheur* is not making headway. She lies low in the water, plunging heavily. She is like a wounded sea-gull beating with its wings in its last agonizing flight.

The mast cracks as if it would break. The sail is bellied out by the wind, but her hull is such a dead weight that she hardly moves.

"Hoist the top-sails! Heaven help us!"

Courage! The boat is under way again! The light-house is not more than twenty fathoms distant, but at the harbor-mouth there is a frightful chopping sea.

Courage! Misery! The mast goes by the board.

"Cut her free!" The hatchets work busily. The mast and the sail drop into the sea. The boat rises lightly. She still floats.

Tossed from crest to crest, helpless now, she pitches and rolls fearfully. On the pier there is a frightful clamor. Hoo-o-o! Hoo-oo-oo!

The *Bon-Pêcheur* whirls about aimlessly.

A wave strikes her on the side and drives her into the harbor. Courage! Misery! She will come to grief against the pier! No! With an effort which

drives all the blood to her heart, Elise gives a mighty shift to the helm. The *Bon-Pêcheur* lies over, her keel almost in air. Hoo-oo-oo! She has gone down in the yawning gulf. No! She rolls back. Is it for the last time? No! The helm brings her up. Ropes are thrown and seized. Two hundred hands make her fast.

"Furl all sail!" The only sail left, the little leg-of-mutton in the stern, is taken in.

And they are in port! Hurrah! Elise, your sloop and your men are safe!

CHAPTER IX.

FLORIMOND accused Elise of meanness and treachery, and declared that he would never forgive her.

When she had ordered the hatches closed, her order had been carried out so quickly that they had forgotten him, as he lay unconscious under the capstan hatch, and had nailed him in like a package in a box.

Shaken by the rolling and pounded by the pitching, he had come to himself, and had cried aloud, but his calls were lost in the noise of the storm. Too impatient to wait quietly for the help which they seemed to refuse him, he had seized the machinist's tools and pried with all his force on the cover. Not being able to lift it he tried to smash it, this trap which weighed him down like a cover on a coffin. He rained a volley of blows upon it. Could it be that they did not hear him? If they kept him a prisoner in this way, it was because he was betrayed.

Then he took fresh courage and shouted until he was breathless, but still the trap was not raised.

Then he understood. It was to destroy him that they shut him up, to wipe out with his death all evidence of their insubordination. In case the boat was lost they would not let him have a chance for

life, as he would have had if free. He would go to the bottom with the boat without being able to struggle even, drowned stupidly like a rat in a pantry. And believing that the others, busy above, were rejoicing at his approaching end he pounded, pounded, without stopping.

He heard every quiver of the boat, and listened anxiously to its groans and wails of agony. He heard the waves beating her sides, as if to stave them in. One after another he felt the blows strike the hull, which trembled to its keel.

Tonnerre! To die shut up, living, in his tomb!

And all on account of this Lison, this girl whom he had taken because she was dying of hunger. He was well recompensed. She was a fraud, a traitress, like all the rest of her kind. It was she who had brought him bad luck.

He had refused to go after Firmin, an idiot who was not worth the danger one would have run for him. Now she was being revenged, this Lison. She had bewitched the crew; she was captain on deck, while he, the true captain, was thrown into the hold like the commonest sailor.

Then, as his jealous fancies grew, Florimond became mad with anger. His breath came hurriedly, he dug his nails into his breast, he was burning with rage.

He threw himself against the cover. If he could but break it loose, so as to open a passage and reappear in the midst of these miserable dogs, how he would lash them as they deserved. He would show them what they gained in taking a new captain—

this Lison who brought trouble and bad luck. She had caused a mutiny, without doubt that she might seize the helm and declare on their return, with the crew to back her, that she knew how to manage a boat as well as a captain. It is death to a boat to have a woman aboard. If only before he went down he could hold her five minutes between his fingers, and drag her strangling in the gulf with him. *Tonnerre!* In his rage for vengeance he tried to lift with his shoulders the covering of his prison, and wore himself out in useless efforts. He was lying flat on his back, exhausted by his unsatisfied hatred, when he heard the hatch open.

Hardly had she seen the sloop firmly tied to the quay than Elise remembered Florimond. Was it possible that, in the midst of the confusion of the squall, the captain had been forgotten? If they had gone down he would have drowned without having a chance to fight for life, or to ever see again the sky above him.

Elise gave orders at once, and to hurry their execution took a hand herself. In an instant she had seized a lever and ripped off the cover; then, dropping on her knees, in order to see and to speak more clearly:

"Cousin Florimond, we are in port—all safe!"

There was no answer.

"You frighten me, Cousin Florimond. Are you injured?" and bending over him she felt his forehead and hands. She started back suddenly, frightened and shivering. He had risen to his feet, his wide open eyes had a strange glare, his raised finger

threatened her. His head touched the ceiling, his face seemed strangely pale in the deep shadow. Elise was so frightened that she threw herself behind the machine, hardly daring to raise her eyes, and trembling as if before a judge.

"Listen, Cousin Florimond, the men sent me to the helm. I was busy with the boat. It is true that I ought to have thought of you."

She waited for his response. Even though it should be hard and unjust, yet if he would only speak, she could at least be able to tell how angry he was by his voice.

"Cousin Florimond, answer me! Do you not forgive me? It was not my fault that they made me take the helm in your place. My body is as wounded as my feelings. Do not torture me any more. Answer me, Cousin Florimond."

His lips did not move, but his wide open eyes glared, as if to chastise the frightened soul who trembled under their menace.

"Mercy, Cousin Florimond; will you break my heart, because I forgot you in the midst of such danger? It all came about from closing the hatches. I ordered it done just as you would have yourself."

Rigid as his own spectre, Florimond appeared terrible in his immobility.

"Mercy, Cousin Florimond!"

And poor Elise, overcome, fell on her knees, her face hidden between her two hands.

"Bad luck! *Tonnerre!* Bewitcher of sailors! You made them nail me in the hold, so that you would be free to take my place. It is your turn to

be locked up. You will stay here until the arrival of the commissaire; then you can tell your story to the police, you thief!"

At this sudden accusation, Elise rose to her feet. She was reassured by his outburst of noisy rage. "I have stolen nothing. It was your own sailors who put me in your place. It was not my fault. You were knocked senseless, Cousin Florimond."

"Be quiet, traitress and——"

He stopped suddenly, interrupted by a call which made him start. "Hello, captain"; he recognized the voice immediately. It was that of the official inspector. Turning to go on deck, he said in a low tone to Elise, "I am going to tell him of your doings."

"Mercy, Cousin Florimond!"

"Be quiet, traitress, thief!"

Leaving her frightened and in tears, he was quickly on deck. The under-commissaire of marines awaited him, very magnificent and dignified, in his tightly buttoned overcoat and his silver-laced hat. He had seen the dramatic entrance of this strange boat into his port, and came more from curiosity than from the demands of the service. When he first stepped aboard he had asked for the captain, and thus had recalled him to the recollection of the sailors.

Busy as they were in unloading the nets in order to free the hull, or working the pumps, the men had not given a thought to Florimond. Besides, their minds were so full of Elise, and of her courage and skill in handling the boat, that unconsciously they had forgotten the real captain.

The officer had surprised them by his unexpected demand. They brought him to the capstan hatch, and hearing Florimond's angry voice they had spoken loudly, so as not to allow it to come to the ears of authority.

As a rule, sailors are not happy to find themselves face to face with a maritime officer. They have always some little fault in mind. The fishing laws are severe, and if they cannot hoodwink the police, they are likely to lose all their profits in fines and penalties.

Florimond had no fancy for this class of visitors any more than his men, and he, too, had upon his conscience certain small sins. In engaging a woman he had not gone contrary to the law, which allowed captains perfect liberty in the choice of their crew. But in the fear of being refused a clearance, he had, when he had showed his list, put Elise down as a man. On this point, therefore, he was not entirely at ease.

On another score also he was troubled. He admitted to himself that the blow with which he had laid open Barnabé's head might cause an inquiry to lie against him for abuse of power. And in the uninterrupted succession of conflicts and misadventures which had assailed him since his departure, he could not clearly distinguish on whose side was the right or wrong.

In spite of his threats to Elise, therefore, he prudently kept silence about her, and told only of the two things absolutely necessary—the disappearance of the small boat, and the theft of the nets. He

made hardly any allusion at all to Firmin's being carried off—a boy without relatives—he stopped short. From the capstan hatch came a burst of sobs.

“Mercy, Cousin Florimond!”

He went on in a louder tone—“a little deserter who got on to the *flambart* in order to seek adventures——”

“Mercy, Cousin Florimond!”

“A young sea vermin who overturned discipline, who——”

The commissaire stopped Florimond with a cynical gesture.

“You are too excited, captain! I suspect there is something hidden behind all this. I will make an inquiry about this little fellow.” And he clambered back upon the quay, where were piled up all that they had saved of nets, floats, and rigging. He verified the importance of the theft, examined the parted hawser and the torn nets, then he summoned all the sailors for an inquiry.

All answered alike, as if inspired by the captain. There had been no trouble on the *Bon-Pêcheur*. Nevertheless Barnabé appeared otherwise disposed. When he saw his turn for speaking come, he squared himself proudly and tossed his head, in order to attract attention to his bandages and wounds.

Florimond saw him. He knew that he would not keep quiet before the police, and that they would get from him enough to make them all trouble. He was thoroughly afraid of some foolish indiscretion. One gains only harm when one meddles with the

law. He placed himself directly before the landsman, and, raising his great figure to its full height, seemed to make that of Barnabé all the smaller. He attracted his attention by a light whistle, and frowned threateningly at him.

Barnabé dropped his head. From that instant he was docile. He had in mind the lesson which he had received with the blow. One would have said that he had been injured permanently in his brain, and that the presence of the captain was enough to paralyze it. But as he lowered his tone at the dictation of his master, he was rated at his true value by his comrades. He, no more than the others, had complaints to make, and the inquiry ended without results.

The sailors had not allowed the commissaire to perceive the presence of Elise, but hardly had they seen him depart than they ran toward the capstan-hatch.

"On deck, Lison! The penalty merchant is gone back to his shop."

Florimond instantly interposed.

"Away there all! Let her cry her eyes out. The first man who defends her I will twist up like a knot in a sheet!"

The men drew aside like cowards, and that was the end.

The necessary steps at the maritime bureau, and the necessary work to get the *Bon-Pêcheur* to the ship-yard, took four long days. During all this time Florimond nursed his anger. He knew now, how Elise had saved the *Bon-Pêcheur*, and what a debt

he had involuntarily contracted to her. The thought tortured him. He almost certainly would not have run the risks she had. He would never have dared to drift for four hours with open seams in such a storm. He would have run before the wind, he would have fallen into the eddies of the Vergoyer, and without doubt he would have met death there.

He had burnings in his stomach, and rushes of blood to the head. Oh, this Lison! He owed her not only his boat—he owed her his life. He would rather have perished. He would not then have had such a gnawing at the heart.

Could it be that his luck had turned? Never had such a chapter of accidents come to a good skipper. What would they say at home; that he was too proud, and that it served him right? He had always been the first to return without a man lost, his bins full; and now to-morrow he must appear, his boat injured, his nets gone, four men lost, too, and not the tail of a fish. Would any one believe that it was not his fault? It is hard lines for a skipper to have to own defeat.

In fifteen days he had three times just escaped with his life. He had been close to death, close to ruin! He would no longer be the foremost skipper of that coast. A young girl had stolen his glory from him. He could hear even now all these sailors singing the praises of this Lison in the taverns at home. What would they say of him? He would like to take a turn of a rope around their evil tongues.

In fact, he could no longer stand the sight of Elise, and turned away wretched at hearing even her name. He kept her away from the work, and was out of patience that she must stay two days more on board. He would have sent her home with half the crew, but he was afraid that, before his return, the sailors' tongues would have already been at work, building up Elise's fame on the ruins of his own.

And only when all was ready, the nets and provisions stored, the sloop careened in the shipyard on the beach, and the farewells exchanged, did Florimond take the homeward route with his companions.

What a sorrowful return it was! They walked with lowered heads, their old knitted jerseys tucked into the bands of their trousers. They were barefoot, with their kits on their backs, their shoes knocking together beneath them. Sailors do not use up good shoes on bad country roads. Accustomed to the smooth deck, and made tender by being perpetually wet, their feet do not take kindly to these stony ways. They trotted and limped like a company in full rout. A melancholy return!

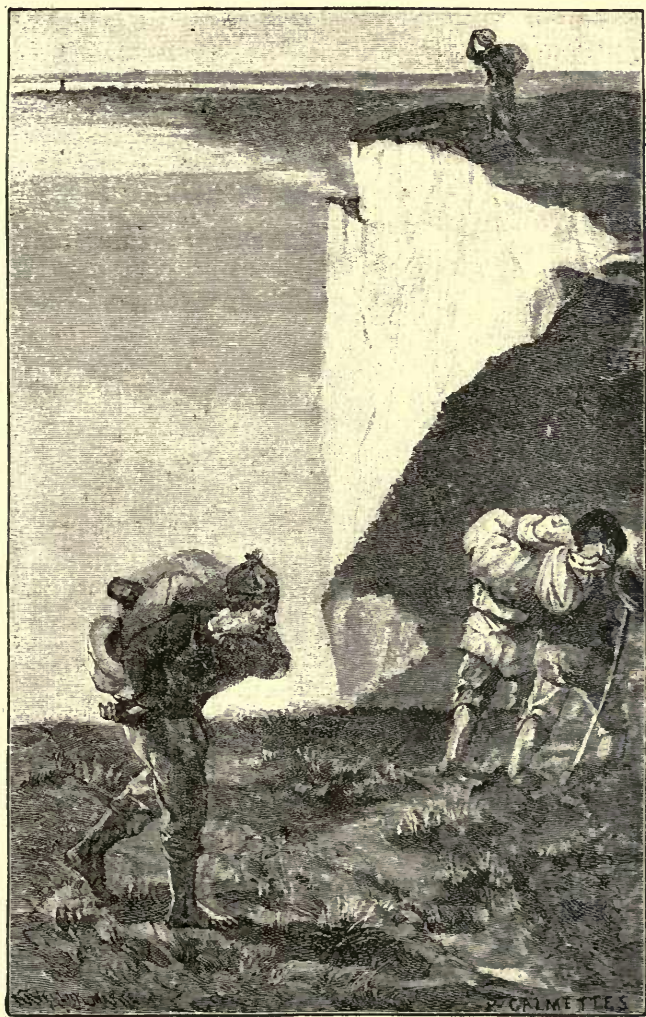
They mounted the rough path to the cliffs. When they were on their summits, they went, for two hours, now down, now up, across the valleys, along the path of the coast guards, close to the sea. The sky was clear. Under the cheerful light their unhappy condition seemed even more sad.

First came Elise, the least bent, the least over-

come. Her glances searched the horizon without ceasing, as if in a last hope. One would have said that she expected to see the boat which had carried off Firmin come sweeping before the breeze. Her thoughts wandered away, dreamy and tender, toward the boy whom she could not forget.

Next came the men, bent like beasts of burden, their eyes fixed on the ground.

Last of all came the captain, more despondent, more stricken than the others, his large back bent, not under the weight of his kit—he would not have minded ten times as much; the burden which weighed him down was one which his strong shoulders had not felt before. Defeat was a heavy load for him. Until to-day, he had laughed at bad luck, had hardly pitied those whose lives he had seen shipwrecked. Oh, this Lison!



A SAD RETURN.

CHAPTER X.

THE sky seemed to mock them. Swept by the winds, it was of a limpid blue, that deep summer blue which is mirrored back on the surface of the sea.

Two leagues on their way the sailors came in sight of a village. From the height where they were they could see it beneath them, nestling in a hollow of the cliff. It was a coast village, without harbor or boats. The houses were clustered together, half hidden by tender foliage. Here, at least, one should be happy. The fishers earned their living from the beach, without fear of tempests, and this peaceful nook at this early morning hour, sparkling in the sunlight, seemed so cheerful that the men stopped, moved by a vague longing for comfort and rest.

They were trying to pick out the tavern, when Florimond overtook them. He was in no mood to enjoy seeing others happy, and his ill-humor awoke at the sight of the peaceful picture below them.

"No, truly, we will not let them see our wretchedness. We can avoid the village by turning off through the fields. These landlubbers, who stuff themselves until they fall asleep, would be only too happy to see a procession of shipwrecked mariners. People who are fortunate love to make merry over the troubles of others. Go on, my lads—starboard."

The men did not agree with him. When they left the boat they became their own masters again, and proposed to make use of their liberty. A sailor ashore has no captain but his own inclination.

Barnabé spoke up :

"Are these landlubbers going to prevent our having a drink?"

And they all began the descent.

"You pack of dry gullets," cried Florimond ; "may you be soaked with water like an old swab!"

Then in a rage, he turned toward the fields.

Elise could not resist a feeling of pity to see him set off deserted by them all. Frank and tender-hearted, she was wretched at the sight of this strong man so upset by ill-fortune ; this captain, so proud and confident in his warfare with the sea, so pitiable in his trouble. She suffered from his unjust suspicions, but in spite of all, she was not able to repress the impulses of her generous nature. Involuntarily, in an outburst of sympathy, she went to him.

"Cousin Florimond, let me go with you. You will not be so lonely if we are together!"

"Get away, traitress, get away."

He could not utter another word. His eyes were bloodshot. His lips stammered out weak abuse. He raised his hand high above his head, then let it fall against his side, and turning, hurried away through the bright sunshine.

"You are unjust to me, Cousin Florimond."

Elise dropped down on the bank by the roadside. For some minutes she watched his disappearing fig-

ure. She admired him so much that in her inmost heart she forgave him.

She laid her kit beside her, and leaned on her elbow, resting her head on her hand. Her thoughts were sad. But presently her eye turned toward the deep blue sky overhead, where the white clouds were sailing, then to the north, where the cliffs fell away and the dunes began, then to the horizon, where the Bay of Somme indented the sandy coast. She rose to her feet. Down yonder, beyond the dark mass of St. Valery, on the other side of the white line which marked the bay, she might perhaps be able to make out the steeple of Crotoy, with its fortress-like tower. No. In this strong sunlight everything was blurred. Through the warm, palpitating air, even objects best known and most loved were indistinct.

But, as if it were before her, she saw in her own mind her native village and the empty cottage. Might she not cherish a little hope? Who could tell! Perhaps Firmin had met some friendly boat, which had taken him aboard. Perhaps he was already at home and impatient at his sister's delay, this lad who was so little used to waiting.

She would have liked to believe it, but she had had so little happiness that she was distrustful.

But if Firmin were not there Silvere would be, and he would understand and help her. There was one person, at least, in the world, who loved her. For, as to her boy, she knew well that she lavished on him more tenderness than he would ever give back. Perhaps he had already fallen in love with a

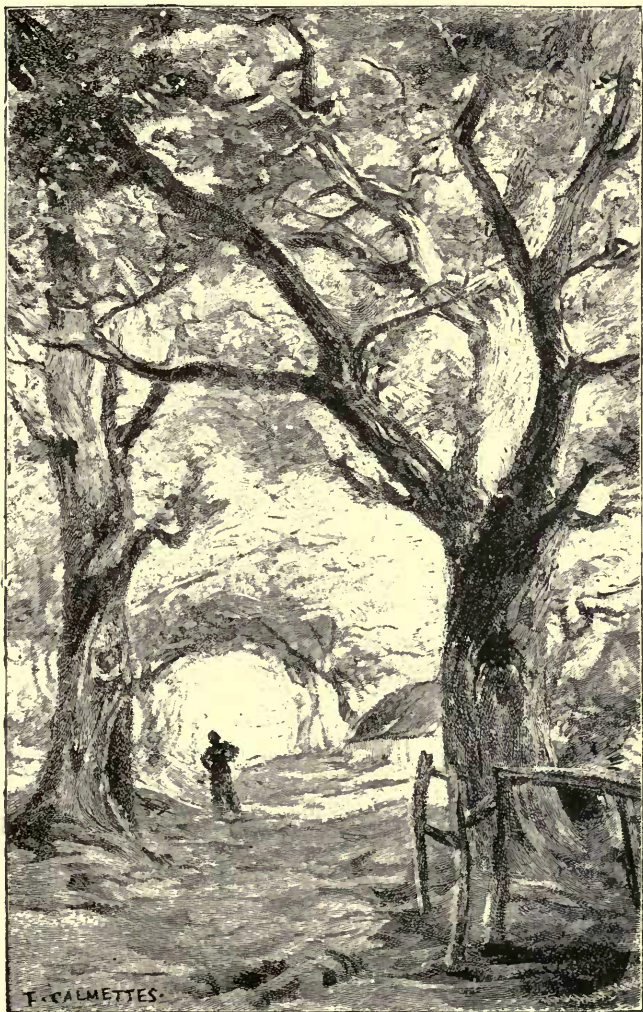
life of adventure on the *flambart* and forgotten his home. He was so strong and confident.

At the very thought of such a desertion Elise began to tremble. No. The boy was obstinate, but he had a good heart. He would surely come back. It was more likely that he was unhappy, and calling despairingly for his sister. His last cry of distress on the deck of the *flambart* still rang in her ears.

From their description of her, it was known at the bureau at Treport that the *flambart* belonged to one of the principal ship-owners of the large seaport of Escaut. This reassured her. She would know where to make inquiries. The owners of the boat had always preferred to pay damages rather than to risk coming into court in such a case as theirs was now.

Filled with hope, Elise took up her march. In a breath she had passed the village, and leaving the sea turned inland along the St. Valery road, which, dusty and interminable, stretched away between two rows of trees, stunted and twisted by the west wind.

Five leagues of this gloomy journey passed. Elise was more tired in heart than in body. The country did not interest her in the least. It seemed shut in and contracted. One could see only patches of the sky; the air was close and heavy. The horizon could be almost touched by the hand. The soil was so poor, so hard to till, that it was cultivated only in small patches; the plough furrows were hardly a cable's length. What a contrast to the



SHE SAW, ACROSS THE BAY, THE LITTLE VILLAGE WITH
ITS WHITE HOUSES.

open sea. How the chest expanded there! What mighty breaths one drew! And one took less time to turn a sea furrow from north to south than it would require to plough a field no longer than a harbor.

Sea life is broad and generous. It stirs one's mental activity, while it strengthens one's body. Elise was in haste to see it again, this sea, as beautiful in its rage as when at peace; this sea, which had made her courageous and strong, and would make Firmin courageous and strong also.

At last, at a turn of the road, the whole Bay of Somme, with its quiet waves gliding under the rays of the setting sun, lay before her. Bathed in a golden mist, she saw, across the bay, the little village with its white houses; she recognized the little cottage hidden away behind the sandy hillocks half way up the dunes. Was the chimney smoking? Could Firmin have returned? No, it was a house adjoining. The cottage was still empty. She would sleep alone in it that night.

But she could not sleep. Overcome by her emotion, troubled at heart, feverish after her long tramp, Elise sought in vain for the sleep that eluded her. Never had her room seemed so lonely, so disquieting as now. A ray of moonlight, entering through the window-panes, fell across its shadows.

At first the melancholy of the night induced wandering thoughts. Then she gazed at the door and window, which seemed to vibrate in the trembling moonlight. Then, as her eyes accustomed themselves to the shadows, Elise was seized with a sort

of supernatural terror. She was not asleep, but her open eyes seemed to behold the unreal substance of dreams.

"Father, is it you? Father, answer me!"

She thought herself asleep. It is only in dreams that one has visions of the dead. She looked all around the room to be certain that she was actually awake.

Yes, she was awake. In the soft light of the moon she recognized distinctly, one after the other, familiar objects, just as she had found them on her return: the little bed where Firmin slept, in the closet under the garret stairs; the large sideboard, where, under a glass, was her mother's marriage bouquet, a huge rose with gold leaves, and on either side of it the two candlesticks. Nets and fishing implements hung on the walls or from the beams of the ceiling. All these old friends of her past life she saw clearly, each outline and color distinct.

No, she was not asleep, but none the less she could not look toward the door without seeing before her a face sweet and sad, clear-eyed and wrinkled.

"Father, what do you wish?"

For the first time since she had lost her father Elise saw him again, just as he was in life, with his otter hat, his red neckerchief, and his brown shirt. He complained softly that she had bestowed all her care on Firmin and had left him, her father, to lie in the sands at the bottom of the sea. She had not made every possible effort with the authorities to have the place dragged, as had been done before,

so that his body might be recovered and laid in holy ground, where his soul could rest in peace.

And he told her punishment. Elise should not see again the brother whom she had too jealously loved, until she had earned him by her filial devotion. Unhappy Elise! She was seated on her bed, and her two hands stretched toward the spectre, which would not leave her; she poured out, with all the confidence of a soul possessed, her excuses, her promises, her prayers.

"Father, I swear to you that I will know no rest until I have laid you beside mother."

Then, as if the spectre had moved into the moonlight, it suddenly became distinct.

Elise had seen it up to this time only through the enveloping shadows which softened the rough outlines, but in this new light the figure seemed drawn by suffering. The complexion, formerly bronzed by the sea, was pale, the wrinkles were deep-set, the cheeks, once so full of laughter and health, were thin from long agony, and the eyes which a moment ago, in the shadow, seemed full of a caressing light, were now sunken and full of reproachful sadness and melancholy resignation.

Emaciated, and with face nearly as white as beard and hair, her father seemed to have arisen from the sleepless night of a long illness. He could not rest in his sandy prison under the sea, with its endless currents, the sport of waves, fought over by sea monsters. They cannot cry like sea birds, these voracious dogs of the sea, but their battles are no less noisy. How could a soul rest in peace among them?

Elise had noted all the marks of suffering on the pale face, she had read there all his reproaches. She knew now too late, that she should, before anything else, have sought her father's body, that she might lay it in consecrated ground.

"Father, father, I swear to lay you to rest in the churchyard. And after that you will let me see Firmin again?"

And not to delay for a moment the execution of her oath, Elise put on her dress and went out.

CHAPTER XI.

THE night was soft, moonlit, and silent. There was not a sound in the village, not a breath of air to awaken the sleeping life. The cock, turning on his rod at the top of the steeple, did not creak; there was not the sound of a blind slamming against a wall; not even the furtive step of a marauding cat. Nothing could be heard except the rhythmic beating of the waves on the beach, and very far away on the heights, in the direction of the graveyard, the plaintive howlings of a dog, wailing to the dead.

It must be the captain's dog. During the fifteen days that she had been away, Elise had not thought of her good friend, the shaggy-coated and brave fellow, who said so many sweet things to her with his thoughtful eyes. She could hear him still. It was he, without doubt, but his voice seemed a little deeper than usual. Why was he howling so dismally, and so far away? Could he have lost his master? Elise had returned late the night before.

She had not heard the news. Could the poor captain have died?

The captain enjoyed great consideration in the village, not only on account of his merit, but on account of his rank. It is true that he was only an officer of the coast guards, who had been for a long time on the retired list, but he was better known

than any of the officers of those parts. Eating little and drinking less, he spent the greater part of his pension in stuffing with dainties the village children, and in feeding his dog Barbet, his only friend and the friend of his whole life.

For twenty-five years he had lived in close comradeship with the same dog, this dog who was now watching on his tomb. The same dog? It was not possible, at least, to tell when he was changed. His history was very simple. Like the greater part of the coast guards, the captain had adopted a dog on entering the service. The first of the Barbets had long, coarse hair. One day he had saved the captain from drowning, and from that time he had treated him as a brother and faithful companion. And this friendship had lasted fifteen years; fifteen years—the life of a dog. Barbet, grown old, had gently come to his end, but he had left a son as shaggy as himself, with long hair, always full of thistle-heads, collected from the hedges. Gentle as his father, the second of the family had the same intelligent and kind look, the same affection for his master. The captain had fed him in the same way, had taught him in the same way, and had raised him to the same rank. They were both corporals, the Barbets, the son as well as the father. On the days of inspection, before the superior officer who passed through the town, Barbet advanced at the word of command, his chevron under his chin, after the ancient fashion, and a stripe of silver on his legs.

He was proud of these honors, because he had earned them by force of application. He knew the

drill, but that he considered as nothing. He was not proud, for all the dogs of the company knew as much. He had a real cause for pride which no one could dispute. He had not an equal in recognizing, at a distance, the boats of his friends.

From the coast-guard station on the height of the dune, he could see them as they arrived from sea, and could distinguish them better than any man or woman. He announced them after a fashion of his own, by distinct barks. All the people of the village had learned to know what the barks meant. During bad weather, when the women, awaiting the return of their husbands, could just make out, lost in the white foam of the sea, a bit of sail above a black hull, they would consult Barbet. Three barks—it was the boat of Baptiste Hénin. Elise, while still a child, on hearing him name her father in this way, had wept, while her mother, with an eye from which the fire of anxiety had dried the tears, watched the strife of the little boat against the heavy sea.

No; it is not Hénin's boat. We can see two masts. It is the sloop of big Poidevin. Look again, Barbet. The dog would dilate his nostrils in the wind. Through his long hair his fawn-colored eyes would shine like gleaming points. Three barks again. Yes, it is Hénin's boat. She comes as if she were flying; one mast only; Barbet is right. And when the boat, pitching and rolling through the tumbling sea, drew near enough to be recognized by all, then it was that Barbet was triumphant, barking every time that the hull disappeared in the waves

and reappeared on their crest. When, after hours of anguish, that seemed longer than a whole existence, the crowd, massed on the dune, finally see the boat reach the harbor, and are all hurrying to assist at her arrival, Barbet follows them in their joyful course. When they arrive at the harbor, he tugs on the ropes that make her fast, then barks joyfully, while all the dogs in the town re-echo his cries like a note of victory.

All these recollections of her infancy, at the same time sweet and sad, come back to Elise, while she stands listening to the howling of Barbet on the dune. Poor Barbet! He was the third of his race, still young and strong in proportion. Elise had known only two of them, but she could not tell them apart any more than their master could.

But whether there were one or two, it was always the same Barbet, simple as a tale, lasting as a tradition. What was the use of a pedigree in a family where the descendant was as good as his ancestor, and when from grandfather to grandson the same intelligent and kind spirit animated them all under the same body?

Barbet ought to know thoroughly the history of the village. He had brought up all the children, and it was he who took them to school. He had learned the hour for going and coming, and he arrived punctually, in order to watch over them on the route. He was a strong hand for discipline. He detested an abuse of power or injustice. It was a bad day for the older children if they struck the younger.

Barbet's mission was to look after the children. He set himself to discharge it, exactly as his master had taught him. Never would he have permitted these little shavers, no higher than himself, to go to school alone. He gathered them into a company from all sides, their books under their arms, their tin forks tinkling against the iron plates in their baskets. Barbet opened his ears at this sound, because his little friends each kept for him a dainty morsel. It was the voluntary tithe of the weak to the strong who protected them. He did not return to the coast-guard station until after he had seen them safely home, one after another, down to the last.

Elise had gone to school with him for a long time. She was his favorite, and he displayed so much zeal in her defence that he would show his teeth if any one even feigned to attack her. She had kept for him always the most dainty part of her dinner, she had caressed him with her little hand, she had looked into his eyes, bending her little cunning head above him. The little girl and the dog were always together at playtime. And on the dune they amused themselves chasing, and playing tag, and rolling on the sand, or still more often they looked out over the sea, and played at recognizing the barks, like two corporals in service.

Later on, when she had become larger, Elise had left school. Then she had entrusted Firmin to Barbet. Unfortunately they were not on good terms. Firmin did not wish to be looked after, and Barbet would not relax his duty. So came about difficulties, which neither the interposition of Elise, nor

even that of the captain, were able to prevent. Elise had been troubled by quarrels, which were renewed every day more fiercely. The boy would box Barbet's ears, would pull him by the tail, put burrs on his head, and in his eyes. The dog, driving the boy before him by barking and by pretended bites, would snap at his calves, now right, now left, and oblige him to march at the end of the company, like the naughty boy of a class. And when Barbet brought him home, Elise always found her brother's face streaked with tears.

She comforted the spoiled child, and felt unkindly toward Barbet for the rough penance which he inflicted upon the little chap, who was so beautiful even in his sulkiness. With a burst of maternal tenderness, she dried his great moist eyes and brown cheeks, where the tears were still running, and quieted the last gasp of the little sobbing heart.

"Do not weep any more, my little man, I will scold this naughty Barbet." But Barbet never was scolded, because he had only done his duty.

All these details of the time when she had lived in careless happiness came back to Elise as a consoling and refreshing thought. She walked slowly under the soft light, lost in reverie, recalling, one by one, these times of her infancy, so sadly sweet and so far away. And, losing herself in her memories of the past, she forgot the hard reality of the present, and Barbet's howlings, half heard, seemed like the echo of forgotten sadness.

She was recalled to herself on finding that she was

at the door of a little house just out of the village, hidden among the trees on the edge of a stream. She had some difficulty in recalling how and why she had come there. She was at Silvere's door.

But was this a proper time to present herself at her *fiancé's* house? She waited some minutes, and listened to hear if the church clock would strike, then impatient of the least delay, she looked at the moon, and from her height in the heavens, knew that it was about midnight.

After all, why should she hesitate? Was not Silvere's mother an excellent woman, who would be happy to receive her in her trouble? All came back to her. Could she have been so troubled as to forget already the double task laid on her, that of finding Firmin and her father? Who would aid her if not Silvere?

Again she heard Barbet, who was howling long and plaintively. It broke her heart. She would have liked to go to him to protect and console him in her turn. But if he were in the graveyard, how could she go there without meeting the ghosts which dance about the graves?

And at this baleful thought Elise saw again before her her father's spectre, like the ghost of a remorse which would not leave her. Seized by superstitious fears, she knocked nervously at the door.

She waited a long time and exchanged many words before she succeeded in having it opened. At last the bolt clicked, the lock turned, the door swung half open, and in the doorway stood Silvere's mother, an old woman with a sharp voice but a kind

look. She was only half dressed, and her chemise only partly concealed her strong shoulders and her old wrinkled arms.

"Alas, my poor daughter, what has happened to bring you out at such an hour? The living do not walk at night. You must go home."

The old woman barred the door with her two arms, as Elise stood on the sill.

"Return home, my poor daughter. You seem like a ghost." The moon shone fully in the old woman's face, but Elise had never seen on her kind features such an expression of distrust and disquiet. She was so disturbed that she had hardly strength to speak.

"Mother Pilote, I need advice, and I come to ask it of Silvere. I cannot wait."

"Silvere has gone away, my daughter. Fishing from the beach he found stupid work. The village was not to his taste after you had gone. He signed papers with big Poidevin on the *Jeune-Adolphe*. He thought that he should see you in the Scotch seas. He has taken a roundabout way to meet you."

When she heard that her lover was gone, the only one on whom she could depend, Elise felt as if a gulf opened before her into which sank her last hopes. Everything gave way at once, her courage and her strength. She leaned on the upright of the door to keep herself from falling, but the old woman, thinking that she wished to enter, pushed her firmly but compassionately aside.

"You must go home, my daughter."



THE OLD WOMAN BARRED THE DOOR WITH HER TWO ARMS
AS ELISE STOOD ON THE SILL.

From the height of the dune came again Barbet's howls. He had stopped from exhaustion, but now took up again his lugubrious wail, making the night sorrowful.

"You hear him," said the old woman. "He is possessed. They buried the captain two days ago. He cannot rest quietly, or Barbet would not bewail him so loudly. You must go home, my daughter."

"Mother Pilote, do not send me away. I do not dare to go to my house. I have seen the ghost of my father."

The face of the old woman contracted with a strange look, and her lips moved feverishly. "Go away, my daughter, you bring bad luck to others. Last night Florimond returned from his cruise. He has told everything. You have ruined him. It is not your fault. Your father's soul is in torment. I am afraid for my poor Silvere."

"Mother Pilote, listen to me. I have seen the ghost of my father."

"Go away, you bring bad luck!"

And, as the old woman rudely closed the door, Elise sank upon the sill, alone in the world, and overcome by her troubles.

At that moment Barbet broke the stillness. He had suddenly stopped howling, and was uttering short barks that seemed like voices of consolation and a summons to her to hope.

"The soul of his master has found repose," thought Elise, and raising herself, as if moved by some strange presentiment, she walked toward the graveyard. The clock on the tower struck midnight.

CHAPTER XII.

ABANDONED by the living, Elise turned to the dead, whose quiet peace seemed to her so sweet. She reached the graveyard well before the first rays of the dawn had lightened the eastern sky. It was still night, but in the half light of the moon there seemed about her mysterious beings of uncertain form and colors pale and unreal.

In climbing the dune Elise had often looked out toward the open sea to the spot where a murmuring and a silvery whitening of the waves marked the shoals. It was there that her father lay with the others under the treacherous wave. But exactly where? The shoals were large.

At the thought of petitioning the administration and taking the other necessary steps, Elise was greatly troubled, so afraid was she of the officials. She had never entered a maritime bureau, and knew, only by hearsay, that the men whom she would meet treated the poor harshly. What should she say to them? That she had seen her father in bodily presence in the night, and that she had been bidden to find his body and to lay it to rest in earth; that she was not rich enough to meet the expense, and that she had come to beg them to send divers in order to snatch him from the engulfing sands.

But they would demand the exact spot where he lay, and her father had not told it. They could not dig up all the Vergoyer. Surely that was what they would say. If her father wished to be found, he must tell where he was.

Elise wore herself out devising unfeasible plans. A fancy seized her to run to the wharf, to seize the first boat she came to, and to sail alone to the Vergoyer. There she would invoke her father to make his presence known. She had heard that a little flame would dance on the water at the spot where a body lay. But at the thought of seeing this palpitating soul she was seized with tremors.

How wretched she was! She was, perhaps, the only one in the village who had no relatives. All the other girls, in trouble such as hers, would have had a grandfather, or an uncle, to help them. There was no one to help her but Cousin Florimond, who detested her, and Silvere, her betrothed, who loved her, but was away.

Unable to depend on any one, she had gone to the churchyard to see Barbet, and to pray on the grave of her mother, where she hoped to find solace for her sorrows.

She felt her hand tremble in lifting the latch of the little gate, and was frightened at the stillness. The tide was out, and the sea was at peace. Nothing stirred. There was not a sound of life.

Barbet had ceased barking. Elise had come in answer to his call, and now that she was there he was silent in distrust—he also, as if he were waiting to see what impious creature dared, at this hour, to

enter this field of shadows to disturb the sanctity of their memory.

She hesitated a long while. She stood with her fingers on the latch, and did not dare to look through the bars of the gate into this graveyard, where, under the trembling moonlight, the wooden crosses seemed to be joining in a dance of death.

If Barbet would only howl, would only bark once.

"Barbet! Barbet!"

A howl answered her, but more unearthly than the night, more mysterious than this spirit-filled space about her. Oh! There were ghosts everywhere!

Yielding to a wild desire to escape these supernatural beings, Elise turned and fled. She ran breathlessly toward the fields. There she was sure at least of meeting things which were really alive; trees whose leaves rustled in the breeze, beasts sleeping an earthly sleep in the fields where they fed.

She ran on, terror-stricken, leaping fences and streams, imagining herself pursued. She seemed to hear a footstep behind her, and ran more madly still through the damp meadow-grasses, knee-high, happy at feeling and touching objects that were real, at breathing the strong odors that were born of life. She threw herself into the midst of a herd of cows who, waking with a start, rose to their knees, and dropped their heads to face an attack, and, the danger passed, sunk down again heavily, dropping off at once into the dreamless sleep of an animal.

Elise recovered her calmness in this contact with



SHE QUICKENED HER PACE, PRESSING HER HEAVING CHEST
WITH BOTH HANDS.

nature. She had never imagined it so cheering and so friendly. She had despised the country, for there all is so pretty, one cannot move without finding a place of shelter or protection. How different this from the sea, where one sails for days and nights without seeing aught but infinite space.

How sweet the odor of the ripe wheat and the hops still green, the reflection of the moon in the pools, the deep shadows of the trees. How willingly would she lie down there in the long grass.

But behind her there followed in hot pursuit something whose form she could not divine. The cows seemed to look queerly at her as she passed them. She did not dare to turn, she would die of fear if she should look behind and see what she feared. She quickened her pace, pressing her heaving chest with both hands. She feared to stop, lest she should find herself face to face with this ghostly pursuing phantom.

She hoped for daylight to dissipate her fears, but the first light of morning had not yet shown when she sank down breathless and spent, in the midst of a field. There she lay unconscious, and, worn out by all she had gone through, fell into a heavy sleep.

The sun was high when she awoke, confused, and with every fibre relaxed by the healthful rest which had followed the hours of fever. Her eyes, still heavy, sought the sun's brightness, and her pale lips opened to breathe the pure morning air. She inhaled sweet odors. Then, as she stretched her arms to shake off her lassitude, she drew back sud-

denly with a start, for her hand was licked by a rough, wet tongue. Involuntarily she turned about, and, recollection coming suddenly, was seized again with fright and buried her face in her hands.

But around her, as if that moment he had thrown off all allegiance to his dead master, Barbet was dancing gleefully. He poked his nose into her hands, into her face, her neck, and in a kind of intoxication of affection and of joyful fidelity, barked and whined softly, as if he meant to swear everlasting devotion. He seemed to say to poor Elise that she ought not to fear or despair, since she had a friend, a friend older than she, but strong and desirous to serve her.

It was not Barbet's ghost, but Barbet himself, with real shaggy hair and real barks. It was not a dream. Happy in the reality, Elise seated herself, quieted by this unexpected help, and hugging him in her arms, talked to him: first, of the years that were gone, and how he had taken care of her, and afterward the little Firmin, who would doubtless soon return, self-reliant as ever. And Barbet rubbed his big head against the heaving breast of his chosen friend. He looked at her with a steady, friendly glance, but she in her overflowing happiness kissed his face; his eyes, that knew so well how to read in the great book of nature; his nose, whose subtle keenness found out the meaning of so many hidden secrets.

"Barbet, old Barbet. It was you who followed me. Why did you not let me know it was you?"

Yes, Barbet had followed her. She alone had

power to make him forget his dead master. There was many a one in the village who would have been glad to receive him, as a rare legacy, as a traditional curiosity. The day when his master died they had dragged him from the coffin, and shut him up in the coast-guard station of which he had been the pride so many years. Rather than submit to a new service he would have let himself die of famine. He had escaped, and made his way to the grave, where over the newly turned earth he had bewailed his lost friend.

There again they had gone after him. Nowhere will men willingly lose objects in which they take pride. Barbet was celebrated on the whole coast from Dieppe to Boulogne. Could they lose the glory of their village? But faithful to the captain's memory, he had resisted all attempts which had been made to draw him away. They had given up their attempts at last. They had not dared to take him away by force, and on the tomb of the master whom he did not wish to outlive, he was waiting for death, when he had scented Elise.

His old friend, this kind Elise, had come there in a time of trouble. He saw her climb the dune alone, without protection or sympathy. Then he remembered how the captain had loved her, how she had been kind to the lonely man when alone and ill in his old age.

Barbet decided that if his master could speak he would bid him love Elise, and return her a watchful affection and vigilant protection for her cares for him. He had decided to live for her, to whom his

master would certainly have left him, if death had not come so suddenly. When she had called him, he had answered the cry of her heart with an emotion strong and deep, but she had not understood and had fled in fright. He had leaped over the wall and had followed her softly, wishing not to add to her terror. And now, through his master's death, they were to be friends for life.

“You are all dirty, old Barbet,” said Elise suddenly between two tears, “we shall have to make our toilet together.” And she led the dog to the nearest pool.

CHAPTER XIII.

ELISE had made her toilet, and Barbet was beautiful to see as they entered the village together. But as they passed along the good people drew aside, and mothers made haste to call their children into the house. When they reached the Grand Place they saw groups of sailors and coast guards talking loudly, and heard the noise of wrangling in the sailors' tavern.

Florimond's voice was above all others. "She is a sorceress! She is possessed!"

Just then a man ran into the tavern, and immediately the sailors came out on the doorsteps, Florimond in their midst, crying:

"Look, Barnabé; do you still persist that I am a liar? Look at the captain's ghost walking with Elise."

The sailors of the *Bon-Pêcheur* were all there, except the four who had been lost in the small boat. They had spent the day before in drinking, had tramped during the night, and had arrived that morning, crossing the bay at low tide. They had heard at once the reports in the village, that Elise, since the death of her father, was possessed, that she could cast a spell, and that she would be freed only when her father's body was recovered.

Mother Pilote was the cause of all this. Since

dawn she had gone from house to house telling of the visit which Elise had paid her at midnight, the hour when the dead return to earth again. She had stopped at one door after another, and had repeated the same story. If her father had appeared to demand help, it was without doubt because he had a sin to expiate. She remembered that once, on a night in March, her husband had heard in the neighborhood of the Vergoyer, the groanings of an old corsair of Berck, who was drowned a few days before, and whose soul could not rest.

She was full of laments that her son was betrothed to Elise. It was too late now to forestall ill-luck, because Silvere was at sea. Doubtless she would never see him again. She had done her best to prevent his sailing. Nothing would keep him back. And such a fine young fellow, and so good! He was just twenty-four years old. He could have passed the examination at Saint Valery, and become a pilot, as his father was before him. He need not have quitted the bay. But young people will not listen to reason.

And Silvere's old mother wept as if her son were lost to her forever. She was just finishing her doleful journey through the village, and had appeared on one side of the Place at the very moment when Elise, with Barbet, arrived on the other.

At a glance, Elise had seen that the sailors were not favorably disposed toward her. Their eyes were distrustful, and even threatening. She could not imagine why. On their part, they had no doubt that the reports were true. Could this Lison have

been able to handle the boat all alone, if she had been like other women? Surely, she was possessed. This was the reason that the small boat had been lost, with the four men. Their relatives ought to put on mourning for the whole four. The idea had gained such credence that Chrétien's mother, the wives of the two big fellows, and the children of the old sailor had not dared to go out without wearing black.

Nothing could have now destroyed the widespread belief in the evil influence of Elise. The poor child, at the ill-natured looks which greeted her on all sides, was stirred to her very soul. Just then she saw Mother Pilote. She ran to her, sure of a friend and protector. The old woman recoiled in fright.

"Alas, my daughter! You have destroyed my son, do not destroy me, too."

The groups of sailors and coast guards had come close to her. Their noisy talking and their loud jeers had drawn the people from the neighboring streets. The whole square was suddenly overrun. Elise stopped. She did not dare to go on. On the right were Florimond and his sailors, behind them groups no less ill-disposed. On the left was the harbor and the sea; the sea even more treacherous than men.

Elise shivered from the soles of her feet to the roots of her hair. Without knowing why, she saw that she stood alone, that she was not only abandoned but repudiated, disgraced, and cast adrift. This was Florimond's revenge.

What could have made the captain so spiteful? He was gesticulating triumphantly. They knew now why he had failed in his fishing, lost his nets, and injured his boat. Could the most skilful captain have succeeded against the wiles of a sorceress?

As if to support his charges, Barbet, who had been walking with ears down and tail between his legs, suddenly waked up. He made the rounds of the Place, smelled of the groups, and returned to Elise with plaintive whines, trying to show his devotion by licking her hand and by affectionate leaps. She did not repulse him. Having only one friend, she could not discourage the expression of his frank and strong sympathy. She accepted his caresses, and returned them.

Encouraged by this, Barbet began to act excitedly. He ran from group to group, growling and snarling; then he returned to Elise, good-natured and full of affection. It was his fashion of showing these perverse Christians that they were not worth as much as a dog in divining the tortures of a suffering soul. One would have said that he took pleasure in his own performance, for becoming more and more excited, he went through it a hundred times, more and more feverishly, contorting himself until he leaped about like a crazy dog.

From different sides of the Place came the same shouts.

"They are possessed, both of them! Let us kill them!"

"They will bring sickness on the village!"

"They will shipwreck our boats!"

"They must die!" Some of the most drunken sailors began to throw stones. Barbet was struck first. He ran to Elise without a cry. He raised himself on his hind legs, and laid against her breast his wounded foot.

The violence of the assailants was increased by the quiet of the victims. The people of the village, full of senseless superstitions, began also to throw stones as if to quiet their fears by the punishment of these two innocent creatures, whom they foolishly suspected of possessing evil power.

Elise wept and made no attempt to defend herself. She was self-accused. It seemed to her that she was expiating the filial neglect for which her father's spectre had reproached her. She believed now that she understood why all these people were against her; they punished her as an impious daughter, who had no thought for her father's eternal welfare.

But why were they so furious at her only, when so many besides her had, without disquiet, left the souls of their shipwrecked relatives in pain. She recognized many of them among those most furious toward her. There was the sister of the lame man, the sons of friend Joseph, the mother of Amadée. They had taken no steps to find their bodies. This ought to hinder them from attacking her, as if they had clear consciences. Their dead, too, were not to be compared with her father. Poor father! He was so honest. She ought to have tried to recover him, if she had had to dig the Vergoyer all alone. And

waiting in silence her time of deliverance, she gave herself up to martyrdom.

But she was not able to keep back a cry of pain when a stone struck her near the eye. Instantly there was an angry snarl, and Barbet flew at the most active sailor, biting him in the leg. The fellow dropped in terror, frightened for his life. The dog was surely possessed; his bites would kill.

There was a wild panic over the whole Place. Barbet returned to the attack, showing his teeth. The sailors abandoned their comrade, tumbling over one another into the tavern, crushing against the door-posts in spite of Florimond, who, to show his courage, shouted:

"You run like crabs before a dog."

And he kicked at Barbet, who snarled at him most threateningly.

"Florimond, do not be so rash. It is foolish to brave the spirits of the dead."

And the man, who from the other side of the Place shouted this out, took to flight with all his companions. Florimond had a little sense. He did not believe in these ideas of the dead returning.

"Pack of old women, just wait and see how I send Barbet off. If he has the devil in his mouth, I will make him swallow him."

He strode forward to kick with his heavy boot this demon of a dog. A fresh snarl, longer, sharper, harsher, stopped him—a snarl so deep and unearthly that the last of the spectators took flight, and, panic-stricken himself, Florimond bolted into the tavern.

Then, with the Place all to themselves, Elise and Barbet looked at each other, half frightened at finding themselves alone.

The man who had been bitten lay still. The skin had not been broken, but he imagined that he felt in his flesh the cold fangs of this dog of hell. He lay at length, like a child who has been stunned by a fall.

Elise went over to him, and rousing him, by a light tap on the shoulder, raised him up. On his face the traces of his fright were still evident.

"You, Barnabé? Have you, too, turned against me?"

"It is the fault of drink, Mam'selle Elise. I had my little glass to celebrate my return. The sailors have fuddled their brains with these old wives' stories. All the same one doesn't know whether they are true or not."

Elise did not wish to hear, but Barnabé began at once to repeat them. As clearly as he could he told how Mother Pilote's gossip had made them believe that the ghost of Father Hénin walked at night. She had accused Elise of witchcraft, and of being supernaturally possessed.

But all was very confused in his mind. Nowadays such ideas are no longer the fashion, and he was not familiar with them. He hastened to say: "I do not believe them at all, Mam'selle Elise. Forgive me; it was the fault of the drink."

In token of forgiveness Elise held out her hand to Barnabé, but he was still a little disquieted.

Occasionally he would throw a glance toward the tavern, as if at a place of refuge. She took pity on him.

"You are not afraid of me, I suppose, Barnabé? I never have done you any harm, and never would."

"I do not distrust you at all, Mam'selle Elise, but Barbet has sharp teeth."

As if to answer to his name, the dog stepped forward. He smelled of Barnabé, scowled, wrinkled his nose disdainfully, and returning to Elise hid his head in a fold of her dress.

"Barbet, I do not like dogs with bad manners. You will not regain in that way the confidence which we have lost."

She took with both hands his kind, hairy face, and made him bark his excuses.

"Pat him, Barnabé; he will not bear you ill-will after this. He has as much sense as men, but he is better than they are." And a treaty of peace was concluded then and there between Barbet and Barnabé.

In the bottom of his heart, Barnabé was much ashamed at having shown himself a coward without any cause. While he was on the *Bon-Pêcheur* he had lost his former free ways and his rough eloquence. Florimond had intimidated him. He did not fancy facing the broad-shouldered captain. Fortunately, on land Florimond was no longer his master, and Barnabé only wanted an opportunity to recover his former position.

"Mam'selle Elise, if you do not bear ill-will, I will be your friend again."

"Why not? Ought I to feel harshly toward you because of other people's faults? You know that I do not bring bad luck."

"Yes, Mam'selle Elise, I do not believe any of these stories about the devil which they tell of you. They are old wives' fables. If you will let me, I will defend you against the sailors."

Barbet interposed. He seemed to say that it was he who was her true protector, and that he would not allow others to take his place, but Elise quieted him with a caress, and turned to Barnabé.

"I shall be glad of your help. I must go to the officials at Saint-Valery, and you can keep me company. A woman does not dare to speak, and you are an orator."

Then they agreed on the time for starting. The bay would be dry before noon. They would have time to go and return before high tide. They were turning to go home to make ready for the trip, when the door of the tavern opened.

A sailor held it ajar to watch Elise. He had seen her talking with Barnabé, and the fact had reassured him. Should a sailor be less courageous than a landlubber? He came out at once, with his comrades at his heels.

When they were sure that Barbet was harmless, as well as Elise, they joked after the fashion of cowards, who think they can save their dignity by jibes. Their coarse jests fell more thickly than their stones had a little while before.

"She will be well protected, this Lison, by two strong jaws, Barbet's and Barnabé's;" and they

kept playing on these two names, and went away exclaiming:

“Barbet and Barnabé; one as much a dog as the other. Barbet and Barnabé! two barkers and two landlubbers!”

CHAPTER XIV.

THE village had fallen back into its accustomed quiet, when Elise and Barnabé set out barefoot across the sands of the bay.

Barbet followed them joyfully. He seemed to have been born again to a new youth, and was thoroughly frivolous. He tossed the crabs in air with his nose, he made the flocks of sea-gulls take wing, he leaped over the streams, and splashed through the pools as if he thoroughly enjoyed this clear and beautiful July day.

In honor of his new mistress he had forgotten his daily duties and played truant, while the village children, left without their guard, quarrelled and pilfered along the road to school.

If he could have seen his company of scholars, some in tears, others rolling in the dust, their hats dusty, their aprons torn, and their baskets upset in the brook, he would have been proud. During the three days since he left the service, the road to school was nothing but a field of battle. Henceforth they would know in the village what he was worth.

But this was not the time for serious reflections. Barbet gave himself up to pleasure, for he had caught a smile on his mistress' face, and that showed him that she was happy.

As a matter of fact, Elise had a strange pleasure in setting out for the Maritime Bureau. It seemed to her that she was beginning the task of reparation which had been imposed on her, and a feeling of contentment and peace overflowed her.

She was not at all deceived about Barnabé. She knew him to be a braggart, of no principle, but in spite of all she was glad to have him for a guide, and above all for a mouthpiece. At times, carried away by his desire to be useful, he made certain suggestions that made her uneasy.

"Have no fears, Mam'selle Elise. These scribblers, all put together, are not worth one good sailor. They must be spoken to firmly. So much the worse for timid folk, if they revenge themselves on them afterward."

Elise had no idea that she would succeed through her companion's bravado. All along the way she reasoned with him, and explained the object of the call. She asked that he would repeat to her, as they talked together, the remarks he proposed to make. And while he went complaisantly over his lesson, she corrected him and softened every violent expression. But he came back always to the same idea.

"We shall lose everything if we let them treat us with insolence, as they do others."

"Listen, Barnabé; I think that we shall gain more by talking quietly."

"No, Mam'selle Elise; allow me to say, it is necessary to make a heavy shift of the helm to make the ship come about promptly."

Elise began to regret that she had asked such help. Her cheeks were red and her heart beat quickly, when she entered the Bureau by the side of Barnabé. She threw about her an uneasy look, as if to make certain that Barbet at least had not forsaken her. He was there, sober and faithful.

The room which they entered was lighted by one low window at the further end. It was divided across its whole width by a railing the height of the elbow, behind which, on a large table, was a huge pile of boxes, books, and documents.

The air was damp and mouldy. The walls were stained in spots by moisture, and the pigeon-holes were black from dampness. Everything seemed unhealthy.

Elise had too respectful an idea of the Bureau to note these signs of age. She had not dared to enter, but stood waiting on the sill, holding the door open. She started at the sound of a harsh voice, which appeared to come from under the table.

"Shut the door there. You let the heat in."

Then in a surly tone:

"They're all stupid alike."

Barnabé was just about to launch into his first burst of eloquence. He stopped short, and turned suddenly to Elise:

"Come into the room. You will shipwreck everything."

Timidly and softly, Elise stepped forward just far enough to allow the door to be shut behind her. Barnabé began in a low tone and a trembling voice. The beautiful, sonorous sentences which he had

planned died away on his lips. The wretched appearance of the room, and its mouldy odor, were so little stimulating to the development of a brilliant and pompous speech that he lost the thread of his oration. For lack of anything better he said simply :

"We have come about the soul of Father Hénin."

"That is a matter for the Church. You should not come to the commissaire when you need a priest."

Then Barnabé began :

"We have come hither, together——"

"There are two of you, then? Let the other one step forward."

Elise advanced to the railing. Behind the boxes she saw, nearly hidden from sight, a little hunchback, who, with his back toward them, was nibbling a crust of bread, while he read his newspaper.

Elise had anticipated an impertinent reception, and to her it seemed to increase the clerk's importance. But Barnabé was not so complaisant. He had promised himself to be magnificent before Elise, and not to allow himself to be treated as a common sailor. But from the feeling of respect which the sailor has for officials he still kept himself in check, and simply raised his voice :

"It is your affair, this matter of Father Hénin."

"What affair? Explain yourself, if you want to be understood."

"The affair of his ghost, which walks because he is at the bottom of the Vergoyer."

From the desk came a growl :

"What idiots!"

Then all moderation forsook Barnabé. He could think of nothing but insults, which he was about to rain upon the hunchback.

"You crooked——"

With a look Elise stopped him. Leaning on the railing, she fixed on him a look both serious and friendly, as if she wished to inspire him with all her confidence. In the half light her pure profile, with its somewhat heavy lines, was softened, and she seemed wrapped in a natural grace and delicacy. Under the influence of her suppliant beauty, Barnabé turned over and over his ideas, without finding any which appeared to him likely to meet with the clerk's favor.

A strange clerk this! He kept his face always out of sight, supported on his elbow, and turned his curious hump toward all inquirers. It was a piece of affectation on his part. Not being able to domineer by his size over the people who came to his office, he had hit upon this attitude of contemptuous indifference. In this way he tried to revenge himself for his disgrace upon those more favored of fortune.

He had a way of disconcerting sailors, for they, more than all others, are outspoken men, and become embarrassed when they cannot meet one face to face and eye to eye. He made them, as it were, talk to his hump, and he moved it about at them cunningly so as to throw them into confusion, when he saw that they were well under way with their statements.

Elise herself was not able to avoid its strange

attraction. She stopped looking at Barnabé in order to look at this strange clerk, and, moved by fear as much as by compassion, kept her eyes fixed on his pitiful and threatening back. It seemed to her that the fate of her request was written on this deformity if she could only decipher it. She tried to read a favorable response.

"It is your——" said Barnabé for the third time. He did not finish his phrase. He could not restrain his impatience to see at least the nose of this man.

He added brutally:

"Have you not another side that speaks also? Are you like one of those round beasts who have no face?"

The head of the clerk disappeared entirely behind his hump. Barbet, who up to this time had been silent and respectful, stood up, with his fore feet on the railing. He proposed to take part in the debate, and since the interests of his mistress were under discussion he wished it to be known that he had the right to interpose. He was no more pleased than Barnabé to see a hump in place of the face which he expected, and he expressed his disapprobation by surly barks.

The clerk turned about suddenly. He appeared frightened. His long, bony face was pale, and here and there were what seemed like dark stains. His eye was that of a sick man, and his face expressed sadness more than ill-will.

At the sight of Elise he appeared abashed, rose to his feet, laid aside the crust of bread, shook off

the crumbs which lay on his chest, ran his fingers through his hair, and took a hurried look at a bit of mirror propped up between two boxes. He forgot all about complaining of the dog, and said with his best smile:

"Mademoiselle, I am entirely at your service. I did not suspect that this snip of a sailor had such charming company. These deck-scourers do not know how to explain anything."

"Deck-scourers! I'll scour your hump!"

And Barnabé reached out his hand. Elise stopped him. She saw that all hope for her was lost, if she did not take the matter into her own hands. Since she had entered the office she had been making up her mind not to leave until she had gained what she came for. She shook off her indecision and raised her head, resolute and firm.

The little clerk was disturbed under his hump. He rubbed together nervously his thin, knotty hands, and with an air of obsequious gallantry, trying to make his sharp voice as pleasant as possible, renewed his offer of his services.

"You injure your cause by not explaining it yourself, mademoiselle. Your sailor——"

"Present! the sailor!" cried Barnabé, happy to find a chance to put in a word. "I will tell the whole affair. I have no fancy to come here like a ship's boy, and watch others work the ship."

He looked at the clerk angrily. He seemed to throw defiance at this chicken-breasted wretch, who made himself agreeable to ladies, preening like a turtle dove. But the hunchback turned from him,

showing Barnabé the outline of his crooked back, which he worked at him contemptuously. Barbet was out of patience. Standing on his hind legs he bristled up his hair and moved his tail, now slowly, now excitedly, according to the state of his feelings.

Elise saw that all this boded no good to her cause.

"I pray you," she said to Barnabé, "let me speak. It was I who saw my father, and I know better what he demanded."

The clerk threw at her a glance of intelligence.

"Yes, mademoiselle, speak. The sound of your voice will make amends to me for having heard these barkings."

"Does Barbet trouble you, sir? I will make him go out if you wish."

"Yes, and the other dog with him——"

He had not finished the sentence when Barnabé, seizing Barbet by the back, tried to lift him over the railing.

"Eat the hunchback! bite him! bite him!"

Barbet struggled, refusing to lend himself to such unjust reprisals. Barnabé dropped him, and deciding to take vengeance in his own person struck out with his fist, and the clerk rolled over and over on the floor, uttering sharp cries.

Immediately from the next room there appeared a man in tightly buttoned overcoat and silver laced hat. He was dressed exactly as the official whom Elise had seen on the deck of the *Bon-Pêcheur* at Treport. He was the under-commissaire, and ap-

peared to uphold the dignity of his office. With a glance of his eye he saw what had happened, and stiffly, and as if wishing to avoid any explanation, gave out the order: •

“M. Emile, you will be good enough to have a placard fastened to the door—Dogs not admitted. Turn these people out.”

Without waiting to hear more, Barnabé took flight. But Elise could not resign herself to see all her hopes disappear on account of such a ridiculous incident. She lifted her great black eyes to the commissaire, sweetly suppliant:

“Sir, I have seen my father’s ghost. He was drowned at the Vergoyer. He demands that his body be found. You have men to do such work.”

The hunchback was still groaning. In his fall he had overturned his chair, and most unhappily caught his hump between the four legs. He was unable to free himself. The commissaire acted as if he did not see him:

“Well, M. Emile, why do you not send these people away?”

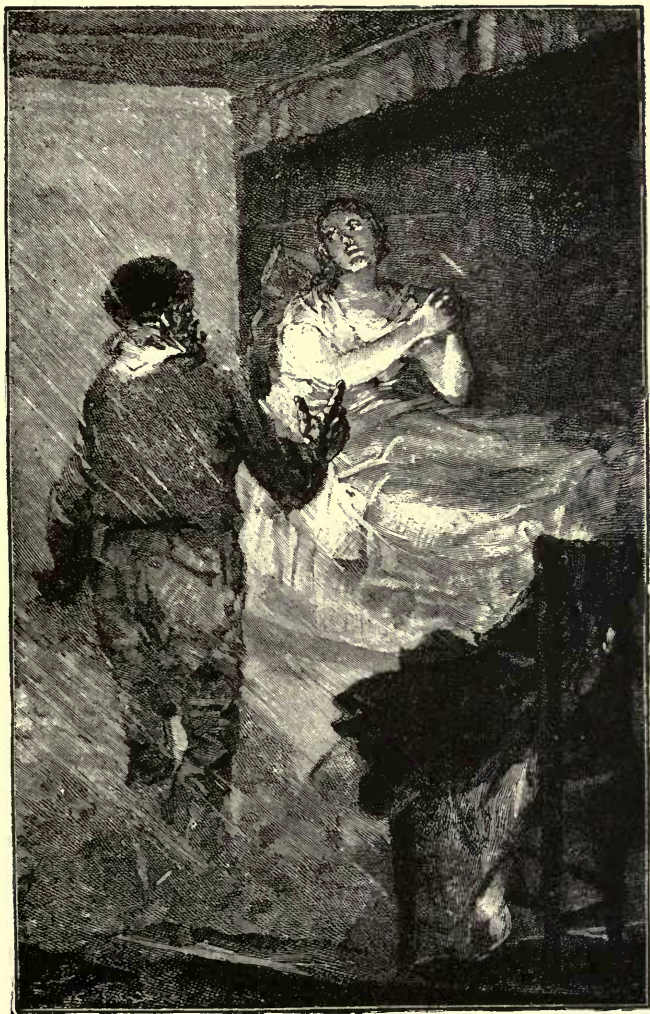
“You are not listening to me,” cried Elise. “I have seen my father’s ghost. He cannot rest in the sea sands——”

“Go out——”

And the under-commissaire pointed so severely at the door, that Elise went in tears and despair. She was nearly overturned on the sill by Barbet who, rushing out, nearly tripped her up, so that she lost

the consolation of hearing the chief in a low tone reprimand his clerk.

"I have been hoping you would have a lesson like this for a long time. I don't pity you in the least. He who sows the wind must expect to reap the whirlwind."



THE NEXT NIGHT, ELISE SAW HER FATHER AGAIN.

CHAPTER XV.

THE next night Elise saw her father again, and the next night, and many nights after that.

"Father," she cried in vain, "tell me where you lie. I can then let the officials know. Help me, if you wish to be found."

The nights passed, but no answer came. Only by sad looks did her father plead his cause. He never spoke. It was a constant grief to Elise, and, exhausted by waiting and watching, she, too, lost the power of sleep. She hid her head under her pillows to escape the ghost, and made Barbet sleep at her feet, hoping to gain a little rest from the presence of this loving creature.

Always the same restlessness and the same sleeplessness, recalling to mind the duty she could not perform, the undeserved punishment she suffered, the insults which the men of the village offered her, and above all, Firmin, who had not come home.

After many dispatches had passed, they had finally learned about Firmin, and the *flambart* which had carried him off.

She had tried at first to reach her port, but had to abandon the attempt. Her hull had been badly damaged, and she had barely been able to make a Scotch port, after throwing overboard everything—nets, salt, and supplies. She had towed her boat in order to save it.

The sight of the boat had been too much for Firmin. With his usual obstinacy, the boy had made up his mind that he would not submit to this forced sojourn among strangers. And one night he had made his escape nearly without provisions. He had slipped into the boat, and cutting the rope, had gone adrift, one hardly knew with what in mind. The crew had discovered his flight at daybreak only.

Since then there had been no news of him. What daring and what resolution he had, to trust himself to a small boat on an unknown sea. Elise wept at the very idea, but it was more from pride than despair. She was proud to know that the boy was so courageous. She was sure he would return. He was always present in her thoughts; she would surely see him again when she had atoned for her neglect of her father.

She worked without stopping. Twenty days in succession she went to the Bureau at Saint-Valery. During the few moments that she had spoken to the under-commissaire she had detected under his gruffness an indulgent and generous nature, and to this she resolved to appeal. But she had not as yet made any headway.

At first she had had to face the mortification of the hunchback. When by patience she had won him over, so as to be permitted to enter the chief's office, she met fresh difficulties.

She recounted to him the nightly apparition of her father and the orders which he had given her. He heard her with the distrust which one shows to

lunatics. He did not speak harshly, on the contrary, he bowed her out pleasantly so as not to excite the mental troubles with which he supposed her afflicted. The next day she was back again with the same fixed purpose, and as he sent her away he pitied her from the bottom of his heart.

Each day it was the same. The commissaire had finally refused to allow her entrance. He found Elise on the threshold. He shrugged his shoulders pityingly. She attached herself to him, followed him through the town, and held him a long time at the door of his house. He put her off, as he best could, with evasive answers. At last he grew impatient, was rude, and even pushed her aside.

Nothing discouraged her. Her indomitable resolution had won over the little clerk, who perhaps was not angry to see his chief in the hands of a petitioner with so much persistence.

"Return to-morrow," he said to her every night, after a fresh failure. "Keep on returning. He will yield in the end."

She did return. She began to be well known on the Place of Saint-Valery. The idlers watched for her coming and going. In the sailors' quarter there was great interest. Bets were made as to which of the two, the girl or the commissaire, would carry the day.

He could not contain himself longer. He threatened to bring the *gendarmes* and to protect himself, if necessary, by the law. Elise was only more active.

"Return to-morrow," the little hunchback kept saying to her.

She did return. She found this daily walk across the bay, to which she had become accustomed, a sort of healthful activity. She was not tired herself, but she tired out the commissaire, who, to get rid of her, finally consented to take the necessary first steps.

He demanded that she should draw up a petition to the minister.

Elise could write, but she felt that she knew too little for so important a matter. She went to the schoolmaster, but he refused to write of ghosts. Then she consulted the corporal of the coast guards, and got from him a letter to her own mind, which with great delight she carried to the commissaire. He refused to send it. The minister would burst out laughing at these stories of phantoms.

She would not give up. She sought the aid of the notary, who drew up for her a four page petition in beautiful style. She was not able to understand the big words and pompous phrases. They were too grand for simple ears. But four pages—that was certainly better than one, and this time the commissaire would have nothing to say.

Cheered by this thought, Elise quickened her steps over the sands of the bay. She had the new petition in her pocket, carefully wrapped in a clean handkerchief, to keep the paper from being rubbed or spotted. At intervals she touched it with the tips of her fingers, to be sure that the four pages had not flown away in the wind.

Four pages! That alone gave her confidence. Certain of success she entered the Bureau almost haughtily, and marched gayly to her friend, the little hunchback:

"I am sure that your chief will be satisfied now."

She untied the handkerchief and carefully drew out the petition, asking him to read it. While he ran through the lines she watched him anxiously, to judge of the impression it made. He nodded his head, and his eyes, slanting over the paper, lightened with gleams which gave them a malicious vivacity. Elise thought that she detected a kind of satisfied approbation.

"It is splendid, is it not?"

"Splendid, no! It is a pity that you have been so poorly advised."

Elise was discouraged, but went to the commissaire. He took the paper, opened, and returned it.

"Four pages, my daughter, at least three too many. A half page was enough, provided it was well done."

He held out the paper. Elise had not the strength to take it. He saw her become suddenly pale, and reproached himself for having been so brusque. He spoke more pleasantly:

"Petitions, you know, are just like prayers. The shorter they are the better."

Then he waved his hand toward the door, politely but significantly. Elise did not move from her chair. He looked at her. She was fainting. He waited impatiently a moment, then rang with all his might for his clerk.

"M. Emile, take the young girl away."

The clerk had run in half frightened. His eyes moved from Elise to the commissaire, as if to ask if one had really called him for such a purpose.

"Make haste, M. Emile, take her away. Draw up her petition and let us have an end of her."

Then, as well as his feeble strength would permit, the little clerk raised Elise and led her into his room. He moistened her forehead with fresh water and brought her to herself by his delicate attentions and his kind words. He was gentle and tender. One would have said that he was delighted to assist a creature weaker than himself, to find at last a chance to do something worthy of a man.

When Elise was herself again, he made her sit by his table, wrote out a beautiful petition on a large sheet of paper, and guided her hand while she signed her name in the right place.

He was not so ugly after all, this little clerk with his playful hump. Elise was touched when, after wiping his damp fingers, he took the paper by the corners, folded it delicately, and with much care addressed it.

When she saw the name of the minister beautifully written on the back of the envelope Elise was taken with a childish joy, as if at last she held a talisman which would deliver her from her troubles.

"How beautiful it is, M. Emile. I am sure no one can write as you can."

Under the charm of this flattery the little clerk became genial. Whistling and thoroughly pleased

with himself he held out his knotty hand to Elise, who took it affectionately :

“Come again to-morrow, mademoiselle.”

Elise had returned, imagining that she would already find the reply to her petition. She had no idea of the delays and formalities necessary in government affairs.

She grew pale again, and was quite upset when the commissaire explained to her the course which her petition must follow. First it must go to the Commissaire of Marines at Dunkirk, then to the Minister at Paris, then to the Maritime Prefect at Cherbourg, delayed, perhaps often, between the three places.

She went away, more troubled and more discouraged than before her petition was written.

If only Silvere were here. She would take him, and go even to Paris, and would not fear to speak herself to the minister. But Silvere had not returned.

He had gone for a cruise of four weeks, and now six weeks had passed. As a matter of fact, a boat never comes as soon as those who watch for her hope, for there are endless ways to lose time at sea. Captains have often come in months after all hope of them had been given up.

The longer Silvere's return was delayed, the more ill-natured were the people of the village to Elise. They never came near her; she even had trouble in persuading the baker to sell her bread. The children made sport of her. They pushed one another against her, then made faces and ran away as if

from an evil thing. In old times they had hung about her in a very different fashion. They were all friends of Firmin. She had let them play in her father's boat, had given them fish on the return from each trip; they all loved her then. In memory of those days she forgave them; but Barbet did not.

He had given up entirely his old habits and refused to take the children to school. He had now a more lofty idea of duty and kept all his time and all his devotion for his adopted mistress.

This caused new complaints against Elise. Was it to be borne that a young girl should keep to herself a dog that belonged to the whole village? Ought Barbet, who for thirty-five years had not failed for a single day at his task, to now go back on all his old friends, in order to trot behind the petticoats of a beggar? He was growing thin, and it served him right.

For, although she denied herself, Elise was not able to feed Barbet as he had been used. Like his mistress, he lived on bread and water only. He did not complain; he preferred an approving heart to a full stomach.

But sometimes hunger made him a little cross, and the night before he had not been able to restrain his injured feelings. When the mocking children pushed themselves against Elise, he had seized one by the throat and half strangled him. Until this time he had driven off the most mischievous by snapping at them as a collie snaps at his sheep, but now, to put an end once for all to these rude jests, he had bitten in earnest.

By a strange coincidence the boy whom he had seized was named Silvere, and all the village was in an uproar. Did any one need further proof that Silvere had perished, a victim of Elise's malign influence? Barbet told the truth after his fashion. The big Silvere! Such a good fellow he was, so kind to his mother. Poor Mother Pilote! Her head was always full of fancies, and this last excitement had almost upset her mind. Whenever she went out she carried a bottle of holy water, with which she sprinkled the roads to drive away spirits from her path.

All these troubles were charged to Elise, but though the whole village condemned her with one voice, she did not lose her faith in the future.

CHAPTER XVI.

SHE had none the less an hour of weakness the night that the *Bon-Pêcheur* went to sea again, after more than a month in the ship-yard. Newly rigged and freshly painted for her cruise, she had returned three days before from Treport and lay alongside the quay ready to make sail for the autumn fishing. It was the longest cruise of the year and they hoped on it to make up for the losses of the summer.

It was the second week of August. The sea stretched away like a cloth of gold with silvery lights under a rosy sky crossed with ribbons of blue. Nothing was so beautiful as this great, grand calm, flooded with a wealth of sunlight, and the *Bon-Pêcheur* seemed as if about to start toward regions of peace and rest. But the sky troubled Florimond. There were indications of rough weather toward the north. What should he do? After losing so many weeks should he waste more days? This was the time of the year for bad weather. He who follows the sea has a rough trade.

So the *Bon-Pêcheur* set out, gliding over the tranquil sea so quietly that she seemed not to have waited for night to go to sleep. Florimond was at the helm, always imposing with his great figure, always impressive as he gave out his orders in his deep voice,

From the height of the dune, Elise, broken-hearted, watched the boat. She remembered when the *Bon-Pêcheur* had sailed before, and how full of hope she had been, and how in those days Cousin Florimond had been good to her. If everything had changed it was because of bad luck. That alone had made him unjust.

Then the night enveloped with its healthful peace men and things alike. The *Bon-Pêcheur* was still in the channel. There was so little breeze that she moved slowly as if to show those on shore her grief at leaving them behind.

They are off, without Firmin or without me, thought Elise, and they do not regret us.

She was mistaken. As he stood at the helm, steering, Florimond was thinking of her. He said to himself that he should not now have an excuse for any further lack of success, that the sky was not over-promising, and that after all he owed his bad luck to the weather and not to Elise. At the bottom of his heart he was really ashamed to have been so hard and not to have at least given this innocent girl the pleasure of a farewell. And as it was now too late to do anything, he grew remorseful and, after the fashion of sailors, who expect always to be punished for their faults, was attacked by vague terrors.

Then night came. It wrapped him about—a night without a moon, of a deep blue, broken only by the glare of the lighthouses which protected the bay. A lantern was lighted in the bow of the *Bon-Pêcheur*. One could see it occasionally as the boat

tacked, then, it too disappeared. When she could see it no longer Elise burst into tears. Her loneliness seemed more lonely than ever, her lot more sad. Henceforth she would have hard work to live, for the *Bon-Pêcheur* had carried off her last dependence—her part of the nets.

It had not been difficult for Florimond to obtain from the owner of the *flambart* a sum large enough to allow him to buy back for the men and himself a complete outfit of nets. He had appropriated the part he should have accounted for to Elise. He claimed that they were due him as indemnity for the losses for which he held the poor child responsible.

Elise had nothing else in the world except her house. But if she had had the chance to sell that, she would have refused. The house had been built by her grandfather, and lived in by her father. She destined it for Firmin, the last of the name, for Firmin, for whose return she was waiting and watching.

In an open boat, alone, exposed to storms, how could this weak boy have resisted seas which engulf the strongest? Without doubt he had gone down, with a last cry to his sister, into some frightful abyss where he would be tossed about for all eternity. If the boy was with his father why should Elise still remain in this world of trouble, unhappy, always alone, with death in her heart?

Was it so difficult to die? It would take only a few seconds to descend the dune. One had only to run to the sea, to close the eyes and walk into the



SHE WOULD SEE AGAIN THOSE SHE LOVED.

waves, persisting until there came the final oblivion. Every one in the village would rejoice; perhaps then Florimond would forgive her.

Half conscious only of what she was doing, and almost delirious, Elise hurried where the voice of the waves called her, a voice that dulled her reason. Lost in her frenzy, she struggled across the sand, into which her feet sank as if it strove to hold her back in spite of herself. With tottering steps she reached the water's edge.

Since the land would have none of her she would trust herself to the sea. She forgot the insults of the villagers; she would have liked to have said farewell to the little hunchback, to Barnabé even, to Mother Pilote, the poor woman who through ignorance had made her so much trouble. She would have liked above all to have left a last message for Florimond, that he should not revile her when she was gone. Had she not a right, since she was dying innocent of any crime, to have her memory at least left in peace?

She felt the water already about her knees. She would see again those she loved—her father, Firmin, Silvere, the men in the boat, Chrétien, the two big fellows, and the old sailor.

They were all there together in that bed of the tempest. She saw them, she spoke to them, gasping and shivering. Her father, Firmin, Silvere, Chrétien; they were all there. She stretched out her arms to them as she ran into the waves.

"Father, come and take me—I cannot move.

Father! Some one stops me—I cannot move! I cannot move!”

In vain did Elise try to escape from the force which held her. She tried to throw herself forward with all her might. She was pulled backward firmly.

“Something has seized my dress! It is dragging me away from you. Father, Firmin!”

She was drawn steadily back. She caught her feet in the folds of her skirts. She fell. She was on the beach.

Do not weep, Elise, do not weep! You shall see them all again, Silvere, your father, Chrétien, and your Firmin whom you so love. You shall see them all, it is Barbet who tells you so.

You forgot him, Elise, your faithful Barbet, but he would not let you die. It was he who followed you, sad and silent. When he realized what you were about to do he dragged you back with all his strength. He is your true friend, your guardian. You were ungrateful to forget him.

Do not weep any more, Elise. Barbet leaps joyfully around you. Do you not recognize his signs of joy? He has consoled you in this way, when you were as heartbroken as now. Look how he points to the horizon. He turns as if to beg you to listen. He leaps again. Look! He is trying to make you see a lantern just entering the channel. Hurry and climb the dune so as to see better what boat this light, so like a far off star, announces. Barbet tells you. Forget your sorrows and listen. Two barks. It is the *Jeune-Adolphine*, big Poidevin's sloop.

"Is it really, Barbet? Is it really, really, big Poidevin's sloop?"

Yes, it is true, really true. Just watch Barbet. He begins his foolish frisking, barking wildly, but always two barks at a time. Have no fear, it is big Poidevin's sloop. It brings you Silvere, first of those whom you wished. He is the first and will show the way to the others.

"Oh, thank you, Barbet! I shall see them all again, and I shall recover my father."

Elise waited a long time. The lantern hardly grew larger. The course of the boat which it announced was so slow, that it would not reach the port for an hour. An hour is often longer than a year to those who are in suspense.

"Come, Barbet, quick! We shall meet him at the landing. Mother Pilote will recover her senses. We must go and tell her the news. Quick, Barbet!"

Elise passed quickly through the village and reached the house hidden among the big trees on the edge of the stream. She knocked joyfully with all her might.

"Mother Pilote, I have come for you to go and meet Silvere."

"Who is there?"

"I, your Elise, Mother Pilote. Silvere will be here in an hour."

"Go away! My poor Silvere is no more among the living. Your troubles have made you walk o' nights."

"Open, Mother Pilote! I have seen the lantern

of the *Jeune-Adolphine* ! It will reach the quay in an hour."

"Go away ! Do not bring trouble to my house !"

"No, I do not bring bad luck, for Silvere is not lost. I have never injured any one."

"Go away ! It is foolishness. You cannot recognize a lantern ! All boats are alike !"

"It was not I who recognized it, it was Barbet. You know perfectly well that he sees better than any one."

"Barbet is accursed like you. Go away, both of you."

"Open, Mother Pilote ! There is too much trouble in the village already without my adding more. Open ! Ask Barbet !"

"It is all the same. I have no fancy for night visits."

"Open ! Since Silvere is returning, why fear me any longer. Come, Barbet, tell Mother Pilote."

As if he had understood her words the dog gave the two barks, known all through the town as the sign of Poidevin's sloop.

"Do you hear, Mother Pilote ? He is never deceived."

The old woman had gained a little confidence. She did not open her door, but through the window the sound of her voice came more clearly.

"Are you sure that it is not all fancy ?"

Barbet barked again.

"If it is true, wait a little, my daughter."

Elise heard her move from the inside of the door

a perfect array of defense, boards, chains, and bolts.

Barbet had stopped barking. He jumped against the door, which resounded under the shock, and which at last opened a little way. He slipped through the space in order to announce the good news to the old woman by leaps and pirouettes after his fashion.

"Oh! my daughter, call off your dog. He will upset my pot of holy water."

Elise tried to enter, but the half-closed door prevented her.

"Wait a little. Call off your dog."

"Come back, old Barbet, there is no reason for wearying every one because we are happy. Come back."

She was interrupted by a dash of water in her face which half suffocated her. Barbet, who received it in his open mouth, retreated sneezing.

The door opened its full width. The dog careered about the old woman so wildly, and leaped so joyfully upon her, that she let fall her pot of holy water, an old tin vessel, which was battered shapeless on the stone.

"Alas! my daughter! Fortunately, I have no more need of it. Since the holy water did not burn you, you are not accursed. It was all lies. They were a lot of wicked people to take pleasure in troubling you. Silveré will make them sing another song."

The old woman hastily threw off her old dark skirt, ran to her chest, drew out her gayest clothes, her holiday dress, a red skirt, green waist, and flowered

hood. While she was dressing she kept on ejaculating:

"They will make a long face, these people in the village! They will have to beg your pardon. Their heads were turned with their fancies about the devil. You will not tell anything to Silvere. He will be angry with me."

"Oh no, Mother Pilote, Silvere is too good a son to reproach you. He shall never do it on my account."

The old woman was quickly dressed. In her haste she had tied her hood crooked, had twisted her mantle in putting it on, had caught the skirts of her basque under her belt. Carefully and with gentle attention and tender respect Elise set the bonnet straight, laid the mantle smooth, and arranged the basque.

"Mother Pilote, you must look as well as possible, so that your son shall be proud at sight of you. He will be delighted at your appearance."

They went out together, calling out the news at each house, to tell the wives of all the sailors who were on the *Jeune-Adolphine*.

Their band increased everywhere; mothers, sweethearts, daughters, they were a goodly company as they reached the wharf. Barbet went before, leaping and barking, like a fiddler at the head of a wedding procession.

Elise had not been so happy for a long time. They no longer feared her in the village. Mother Pilote had treated her as if she were her daughter, and the women spoke to her pleasantly.

When they reached the pier the lantern shone close at hand in the end of the channel, nearly at the harbor mouth. There was no doubt about it. It was Poidevin's lantern. It was hoisted at the top of the mast, and by its light they could distinguish, through the darkness, the sailors they knew to belong to the *Jeune-Adolphine*. Two long barks announced them.

"Ho! Poidevin!" shouted all the women together in an irresistible burst of emotion.

"Home again!" repeated twenty voices through the night, twenty voices with strong, well-known accents

When the sloop came alongside the wharf, and its red lantern flooded the deck, showing big Poidevin himself at the helm, and the black forms of the sailors at work, there broke out from the women cries of happiness and sobs of joy, and Mother Pilote drawing Elise to her lips, held her fast in a long embrace. She had seen Silvere.

CHAPTER XVII.

SILVERE returned rich, for some time at least, for the *Jeune-Adolphine* had made a great success of her cruise. She was so heavily loaded with fish that she had been hardly able to reach the market at Dieppe, which was better than that of Boulogne. They had thus gained by their delay, and when the fish were sold were well paid for their trouble.

Before going north again for the second cruise they had come to pass a week with their mothers, wives, and daughters, those who tell off day after day, like a chaplet of sorrow, the long months of absence.

The day after his return Silvere did not leave Elise. All day long, happy in being together, they walked the dunes, confiding to each other the overflowings of their hearts. She told him with caution of the persecution of which she had been the object, but said nothing about the part which Mother Pilote had played. He had learned the truth, however, from another source, and Elise seemed to him only more attractive and more worthy of being loved.

"Elise, I will not go on the second cruise. I am not willing to leave you alone in the village. You have such speaking ways. There is no one who has their heart in their eyes as you have. When you sailed away before, I felt that I should never see

you again. I was always on the lookout for you in the North Sea, and I hardly slept for watching the horizon."

"You are good to have loved me. I, too, often called on you when you were far away."

"Let us marry, Elise. I will not leave the village. Mother Pilote will be delighted."

"Listen, Silvere. Until I have found my father's body I might bring trouble between us. Later on I will be happy to be your wife, so as to care for you and pay back all the kindness which you have shown me. You are the only one who has not forsaken me."

"But if your father should not be found? Ought we not to marry just the same? Would he wish such an injury to his child?"

"Let us look for him. I cannot bear the idea of his being tossed about pitilessly. If you had seen him, as I have, you would help me snatch him from the dreadful sea."

"It is not the will, it is the means which we lack. What is it? Are you ill? Why do you tremble so?"

"Do you see that man watching us? He is hidden in the crow's hole."

The crow's hole had been dug in the sand by hunters, who lay there in wait for wild birds as they passed overhead. In the first days of autumn it served as an ambush against the gray crows from the north, who passed over the village on their way to the neighboring fields. It was from them that it had taken its name.

As Elise and Silvere came near, some one crawled out, bent double and creeping on all fours, as if to escape observation.

"What is Barnabé after there? He is not likely to find any great chance to do mischief in this sandy waste. Ho! Barnabé?"

But Barnabé was deaf to the call, and hurrying only the more, soon was out of sight.

"I would rather see his back than his face, Elise. He, at least, has made you no trouble during my absence."

"On the contrary. He has been better than the others. But your coming has upset him. All day long he has been looking threateningly at me."

And Elise leaned more closely and more timorously against her lover. He held her hand, and, under the firm pressure, she felt a caressing warmth which made her heart glow.

"Silvere, I have never known anything so sweet as being loved."

She threw a restful glance at her lover, whose huge figure seemed a tower of strength to her.

"I am so strong now. One is weak when one fights alone."

"Lise, my beloved, my two arms, all my strength, belong to you always. For your happiness——"

He stopped short. Elise had begun trembling again:

"Silvere, look—there—behind us. He is following me. His eyes are wicked."

"Who? Barnabé? Wait a moment. I will give him a bit of advice to let you alone."

"Oh no? Do not leave me! I am not happy unless you are with me."

"Listen, Elise. It is intolerable that you should be threatened by this rascal. I will clear the road of him."

Silvere ran toward Barnabé, who took to his heels instantly, muttering threats.

This was not the first day that Barnabé had followed Elise, but she had not wished to say so for fear of making trouble between him and Silvere. But she was not able to resist the urgency of her lover, and let him see a little of how matters stood.

After the first visit to the Bureau at Saint-Valery, Barnabé had returned to the village in a most self-satisfied state. He had filled the tavern with his boasts, telling with many words how he had chastised the insolence of the little hunchback, and swearing that he would return the next day to take the commissaire by the nose. He wanted to accompany Elise on her second visit, but she refused, thinking that such an unbridled advocate would ruin the best cause. He was angry, and followed her, declaring that he would be her champion whether or no, and that he would make her see reason in spite of herself and every one else. She had had to take a decided stand with him. He followed her to Saint-Valery, and fear alone had kept him outside the Bureau. He returned often with the same intention; finally he gave it up, and, in revenge for her slight, had gone over to the girl's enemies.

This that Silvere drew from her was not all, for Elise had not thought it wise to tell everything to

her lover. Barnabé was truly a bad fellow. On their first visit to Saint-Valery he had made disgraceful proposals. If she should recover her father's body and his money, Elise would be rich, and he had offered to marry her. He believed her, then, capable of breaking her troth. At that time it is true they thought Silvere lost, but for her he would have lived always. She would no more be false to him dead than she would have betrayed him living.

Softened by her thoughts she smiled at her big friend, in all the confidence of her heart. "Silvere, I am so happy. We will work together to recover my father's body. Take me in your boat to the Vergoyer. Perhaps we can find the place where he lies. That would help us very much in our demands at Saint-Valery."

The following morning, well before dawn, all three set out together, the two lovers and Barbet. The breeze which came with the day sent them briskly along. The sea was smooth, and in a half hour they were out of the channel. Then, spread out before them, they saw gleaming under the rising sun the sea that hid, as if under a smile, the treacherous abyss.

Seized by a strange emotion Elise drew near Silvere—she found herself irresistibly drawn as by some charm to this new life so sweet and protecting. This big Silvere, who was so gentle, she loved for the faith he had in her.

"Silvere, I believe that we shall find my father, and that he will bid us marry."

They were drawing near the Vergoyer. The reflection of the sun made delusive gleams, and a dull rumbling seemed to come from the depth of the sea, frightful like all noises whose cause is not known. The boat, now fairly in the rough water, resounded under the blows of the waves.

It was time to take soundings. Elise took the lead, then leaning well forward in the bow she whirled it around her head and with a sudden fling threw it far before her into the sea. When the boat on its course passed over the place where it lay on the bottom, Elise drew the cord taut, and, hauling it in, counted the number of fathoms which it marked.

"Ten fathoms, Silvere. We are on the shallows. Father was wrecked in the gulf."

From fathom to fathom they sounded to find the greatest depth. Silvere scanned the surface. At the places where the waves seemed quietest he fancied they would find the greatest depth. He steered there, but he was mistaken—seven fathoms only.

The boat tacked again. Misery! Only five fathoms. He changed her course. Twelve fathoms—at last—eighteen—twenty-two—keep right ahead, we are approaching it. Misery! It shoals again—nine fathoms only. For a long time they tried to find the gulf, which they knew to be at least sixty fathoms deep.

"Elise, time passes. We must not delay if we are going to return with the morning tide. The breeze will not be with us as we go back. We will

come again to-morrow, and will consult the villagers who are best posted."

"Let us try again, Silvere. Perhaps our ill fortune will leave us. One cannot search always without finding."

Elise tried the lead ten times more, but without success.

"Enough, Elise, let us come about. The tide is falling. We shall not have water enough to get back."

"Why not wait until night! I have no doubt that if we call upon my father he will make his presence known. With you I am not afraid."

"No, this is no place to sail at night. One blast from the northwest, and the canoe would be turned keel in air. We——"

His words were cut short by a bark. Barbet was standing up, his feet on the gunwale, his ears erect his nostrils distended.

Elise ran to the stern. Panting and troubled she fled to Silvere for protection. Both were silent, every nerve alert, while the boat held its way with no thought now of turning about. Leaning on each other, motionless, they seemed united by the same feeling of tenderness and affection.

At that moment a sharp, angry growl interrupted them.

"It is no doubt here that the lame man lies. You know, Silvere, the little red-haired man who made so much trouble in the village? You remember how Barbet always growled at him? It was just as he did now."

The boat sailed steadily on. Barbet barked five times. Elise hid her head on Silvere's breast and murmured in a low tone:

"It is the launch of friend Joseph. They are all there then."

"Yes, they are in the gulf. They drifted there after being shipwrecked on the shoals."

"Oh! Silvere, do you hear Barbet? We are over the lost sailors' gulf."

"Eight barks. It is Amadée's sloop." They are all there. How many besides, from Berck and Cayeux, that Barbet did not know at all?

"Do you hear? Three times—can it be so—three times only—three times—it is father." And while Silvere struck the sail to stop the boat, Elise cried out:

"Father, are you there? You will forgive me now that I have found you. Father, are you there?"

The anchor ran out, and the boat came into the wind. Barbet began his barks again—always three together. It was the boat of her father and his six companions.

Elise took the lead and let it slip overboard. When she felt it had reached the bottom she had a shiver. She raised the cord slowly and drew the lead aboard carefully. Its bottom, smeared with grease, had brought up a light covering of fine sand. She looked at it abstractedly for a long time.

Silvere did not dare to break in on her pious thoughts. The full noonday sun shone in splendor, and in the clear light which seemed to envelop her

the young girl seemed to brighten and to be alive with a new force.

"Elise, we will make a buoy fast to the anchor. If we do not go at once we shall find the bay entirely dry."

Recalled to herself, Elise made haste to measure the depth.

Sixty fathoms, over a bottom of fine sand. It was surely the abyss which the old men called the lost sailors' gulf. "Father, if you are really there, do you pardon me?"

At that very instant Barbet gave three quick joyful barks, then kept on barking without taking breath. He had answered Elise. He announced her father's forgiveness, the end of all her troubles, and a life of health and happiness.

Then forgetting her unhappy past in her new hopes, Elise sat beside her lover and offered him her hand.

"Silvere, my father gives me to you. You alone have not failed me. I am no longer afraid of being loved."

CHAPTER XVIII.

AFTER a last thought consecrated to the past they quitted the lost sailors' gulf. At the place pointed out by Barbet, Silvere left the anchor, made fast to a float, as a guide for the future. At last the boat headed for home. But the wind was against them, and they made so little progress that they soon had to give up the idea of entering on the day tide.

Elise saw this before Silvere told her. What difference did it make? She had regained her hope in the future, and, in the reaction from her past sufferings, was thoroughly happy. Leaning toward Silvere she looked at him so gratefully that the young man could not contain his emotion:

"Elise, you know that I would willingly give my life for you. From this hour there shall be no more sorrow for us."

What is Barbet trying to show them?

"Is it that wretched boat which excites him so?"

"Yes, yonder, with the brown sail. The boat which sails in our wake."

"It seems as if it followed us, tack for tack. I will find out."

"Silvere, do not let us trouble ourselves about other people's affairs when they are no concern of ours. Let each one be left to his own devices!"

Silvere was obstinate. He changed the boat's course, he tacked and luffed at random, or kept straight ahead. The other boat followed each manœuvre exactly.

The chase lasted for five hours. As they had to wait for the tide they kept in the open sea, so as to have more room than in the channel; but whatever direction Silvere took he always saw astern the little brown sail, taking the wind just as he did. It became irritating. He kept his eyes on his unknown enemy, but, whenever he tried to overtake him, the brown sail always escaped before he was near enough to recognize it.

"It is not from our village. It must be a boat from Cayeux. *Parbleu!* We have not had our eyes open. I recognize that short mast. It is the *Marie-Albert* of Saint-Valery, Barnabé's uncle's boat. There are two men on board and I imagine that he is one of them, the wretched landlubber."

Elise was seized with painful forebodings. Was she never to have a quarter of an hour's pleasure free from fears? What could he be after, this Barnabé, that he attached himself to her as if she belonged to him?

"I will overtake him," cried Silvere suddenly. "I will have satisfaction or capsizes first."

"Silvere, I beg you, give up this useless pursuit. If we come up with Barnabé what complaint have we to make. Trouble comes fast enough without going to meet it half-way."

"Elise, since we have spare time let us make use of it. Look to the sail—Starboard."

Pressed against the tiller Silvere paid no attention to her, and spoke only to give orders. He changed the boat's course so quickly that she received blows and shocks enough to capsize her. They gained on the enemy by skilful sailing, but she quickly made up what she had lost, and the men in both boats were so occupied, one in flying, the other in pursuing, that they paid no attention to their course. It was a wonder that they had not run aground on the shoals twenty times.

At one time they were so close together that the men glared at one another, and excited by this exchange of angry looks threw at each other a volley of insults.

"You great gull, you shall not have Elise to yourself. I will come and take her in such a fashion that she will not resist."

"Look after yourself. Your claws shall be cut for you."

Barnabé's uncle, an old fellow with a groggy nose, kept sullenly silent, evidently in a very bad humor. Elise interposed :

"Silvere, I pray, let us leave them alone if we wish them to leave us alone."

"No, I will scour the hair of this miserable cur. What business has he to come smelling after us? Starboard—port."

His orders followed so quickly, that they were tossed about without cessation. All at once Elise uttered a cry of distress.

"Silvere, we have returned to the Vergoyer."

Silvere did not hear. He did not know what

risks he ran, or where he was going. He saw only a brown sail which continually escaped him, and which he had sworn to overhaul if he had to follow it to the shores of England.

Every instant there came new tacks and new shocks, and on the choppy sea of the Vergoyer the two boats pitched wildly.

"We shall overhaul them, Elise—port!"

"Silvere, do not take the trouble. See, here is our buoy. We are back again at the lost sailor's gulf."

"Be quiet. You keep the boat back by your talking. We are losing headway. Port—Lise—Lise——"

"What makes you grow so pale! You frighten me!"

"Lise—Lise——"

"Enough, Silvere. We risk our lives at every tack. Shall we keep on until the Vergoyer has devoured us too? You frighten me—you are so pale—speak to me—speak to me. Let us give up the chase, I beg, as a proof of friendship."

"Lise—Lise——"

"Are you suffering?—answer me—have you had a blow? We shall surely be capsized if we do not get away from here."

"Elise—there—there——"

"Speak plainly! You are killing me with anxiety!"

"There—the brown sail——"

"Misery! Can it be? What has become of her? I cannot see her. Barnabé—ahoy!"

Elise shouted again and kept on shouting, but

Barnabé did not answer. At the minute she had lost sight of him he had brought his boat about at the wrong moment, and it had turned over so easily that it seemed as if he had intended it.

Poor Barnabé! He had better have gone again on the *Bon-Pêcheur*. But at the thought of finding himself face to face with Florimond for long weeks, fast between two planks with no chance of escape, he was anxious to cancel his engagement. His request had been promptly granted. No one regrets losing a bad companion.

Their thoughts were full of him as Elise and Silvere left the Vergoyer. Poor Barnabé! He was not really bad at heart. He was more dangerous in his friendships than in his enmity, for his evil tongue spoiled all the good he did. He certainly did delight to annoy others, and so was the cause of his own death. Ought one not to forgive him?

Elise remained thoughtful for a long time. She had gone to the stern, and was leaning on Silvere's shoulder while he delicately lent himself to the rôle of protector. He laid a course that did not require him to change the sail, and in working the tiller he was careful not to stir his shoulder where Elise's head was lying quietly in melancholy abstraction. Sweet Elise! He did not dare to bend his head so as to look at her, but he felt that she was in a reverie, and held his great body still in a sort of respectful adoration.

He surrounded her with caressing thoughts. He felt the warmth of her forehead on his shoulder, her hair brushed his cheek. He heard her breath light

and soft in rhythm with the rough breathing of Barbet. The rise and fall of her chest, supported on his own, sent through him a shiver of pleasure. He smiled over her, his dear Elise, with that sweet smile which fathers have for frail children to whom they give all tenderness.

Elise's thought was at the same time pleasant and sorrowful. She held Barbet between her crossed arms and craftily closed his mouth to restrain his joyous outbursts. Truly the dog was lacking in reserve. From the moment that the brown sail had disappeared he had broken out into joyful barks. Even at this very moment, notwithstanding her fingers which with all their might held his mouth closed, he half opened it and threw out little joyful cries. Elise awoke with a start from her dream.

"You have no respect, Barbet. Come, be quiet. It is only a villain who rejoices over the death of others. Be quiet."

Recalled to propriety by a light tap on the nose, Barbet lay silently in arms which held him tightly. Then Elise fell a-thinking again, while Silvere, tender as a lover, attentive as a faithful friend, supported her. He was happy because he saw that her confidence had returned, and he was taking her home.

They entered the channel, slipping homeward with the tide as it came into the bay. Already the last gleams of twilight had faded from the sea and left it black, for the night was without moon and without stars. The breeze had not changed since morn-



HE WAS HAPPY, BECAUSE HE SAW THAT HER CONFIDENCE
HAD RETURNED.

ing and Silvere counted less on it than on the tide. He held the tiller fast, and not having to work the boat gave himself up to the enjoyment of the moment.

He started suddenly with an intuition of danger. Quick! This is no time for dreams. Night is the time for collisions. Besides, was not a soul in his keeping? Ought he not to watch over this child whom he held trembling on his heart?

"Listen, Elise. I am sorry to break in on your reverie, but there is a tug behind us drawing a large boat. I think it is a schooner from the orders given out. She will surely run us down if we do not light our lanterns."

He was right. Hardly had the lantern glimmered at the mast-head when there came from the direction where he had heard the noise a shout, in a voice which emotion rendered sweet and far reaching:

"Boat ahoy! Ahoy!"

Silvere steered his boat one side to avoid a collision, and when, behind the tug, there passed through the darkness a large schooner with lofty masts, the same clear voice came from her deck:

"Silvere Pollenne—Elise Hénin—Ahoy!"

"Chrétien Loirat!"

"And the Danzels and old Coulin!"

"All aboard here!"

Hurrah! They were all there—the four men who were lost from the *Bon-Pêcheur*—Chrétien, the two big fellows, and the old sailor. All were safe again. Firmin no doubt would soon come in his turn.

Then, in an outburst of happiness, Elise threw

herself into the arms of her lover, who pressed her gently to his breast.

"Silvere, I should have been dead if you had not loved me. Now we will be married and together will take care of Mother Pilote."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE four sailors of the *Bon-Pêcheur* could not return home at once. They were on a schooner bound to Saint-Valery, and had to wait until, at dawn, the outgoing tide would leave the bay dry. But when Silvere reached home that night he spread the news of their return, and their wives, who had waited so long, were only too happy at the thought of going to meet them.

All had donned their best clothes, and, with white bonnets and skirts so gay that they seemed to brighten the night, were ready when, at two o'clock in the morning, the sand began to be bare.

Over the bay it was still night. The lanterns on the far-off quay of Saint-Valery were their only guides, as, in the darkness, the party tramped across the rough sands and splashed through the pools.

The children, sodden with sleep, dragged themselves along, and the poor old lame grandmothers tried to keep up with the young wives, who walked briskly as if their impatience set their pace. First came the wives of the two big fellows. Each carried a baby in her arms, while other children held on to their skirts. Then, in a family group, came the sons and daughters of the old sailor. Some, grown up and married, had babies of their own, others were still only boys and girls. Last of all came

Chrétien's mother, elderly but not yet old, though already uncertain of step.

Good Mother Loirat had had a hard fight during the seventeen years of her widowhood. By severe toil she had won a livelihood from these arid sands, and had brought up four sons. Alas! The sea had taken three of them in one day, all lost with Hénin's boat. And now that the youngest was old enough to earn their bread, she had believed that he, too, was lost.

Like all unfortunates whom trouble has followed, even in their old age, she had long since given up hope, but her last energies had been awakened by this final blow. Her sweet Chrétien, blond and bright-eyed, was the one of her four sons who most closely resembled his father.

Father Loirat had been one of the crew of a lugger of Hourdel. It fished during the week on the coast, but returned to its own port, every Saturday, to enjoy the Sunday's rest. His wages were small, and the work uncertain; but if he made a poor living, he was at least able to spend one day a week with his family.

When Mother Loirat thought of those Sundays of other days, her eyes filled with tears. Her husband took a child in each hand and she a third in her arms, and they walked along the dunes under the open sky, or they watched the weather. He lay on the sands, smoking his pipe without a thought. She, seated beside him, hushed the baby to sleep on her knees. They sought no other pleasure than to be together, and good Mother Loirat,

who had never known happier days, looked back on them regretfully, as on a vision of the past full of sweet pictures and tender recollections.

One Saturday in September, after a heavy equinoctial tide, her husband had come home burning with fever, his eyes bright, his limbs shaking. Twenty-four hours after he was dead, just one month before his fourth child was born. Loirat was named Chrétien. In memory of him the newborn child was given the same name, and as he grew up he more and more recalled his father by his open face and frank nature.

To Mother Loirat he was always her little lad, her Chrétien, blond and frank-eyed. Had sixteen years then really passed since he was born? Was it not rather yesterday that, during the day tides, she had carried him in her basket on her back, and set him down on the sand, while she bent over busily gathering shells? When she came back to him, weighed down by her load, she forgot her fatigue in watching his sweet little smile.

During the night tides she left him sleeping in her cabin with his elder brothers, all young together. She had worked fast at such times, so as not to return late and find the child awake and crying for her.

To him, the same as to others, came the time when he was old enough to learn a trade. So he had sailed on the *Bon-Pêcheur*. And one night they had come to his mother to tell her that he was lost. She, who had borne without complaining, all the caprices of fate—the loss of her husband and of her

three sons, had had for Chrétien her first outbreak of indignation and revolt. Had she not more than paid her debt, and was it not now for others to give to the sea the tribute which she demands, as a kind of revenge, from the men who harass her?

No, she would not believe that her boy was dead, and the night before she had received the news of his return as quietly as if it had been a thing foreseen. But she was none the less impatient. Under her furrowed brow, her keen eye looked through the shadows of the night for the figure she was awaiting.

Dawn was coming, but the distant landmarks were still lost in a heavy obscurity. A strange atmosphere came off the sea. They could hardly breathe. Though it was the end of night it was as warm as at midday. At long intervals, in the south, beyond the steeple of Saint-Valery, pale lightnings furrowed the sky. The storm seemed at times as though it would not reach them. Under the oppression of the weather they had slackened their pace, and at the first gleam of day were only at the middle of the bay. A stream, broad if not deep, which they could not pass without wading up to their knees, brought them to a halt. The wives of the two big sailors had already tucked up their skirts and were passing the children across, tossing them from hand to hand and carrying the larger ones astride their backs.

"Come, good Mother Loirat, it is your turn."

The poor thing weighed nothing at all. She took up so little room in the strong arms which car-

ried her, that the woman could not help saying kindly:

"One would make little profit off of you, Mother Loirat. You have not more than twenty-five pounds of fat to sell."

"Trouble is poor nourishment, my poor daughter. When you have eaten as much of it as I, you will have as little flesh on your bones."

But there was no time to lose in talk. Across the white clouds which were fast increasing, the steeple of the church of Saint-Valery stood out above the dark mass of houses and of trees over which it towered, while at the foot of the town the channel of the Somme was plainly marked, as it took its even course seaward. The women looked about them. They could see nothing, could hear none of those joyful outbursts which ordinarily announce sailors' return.

They made haste, but so did the storm. Fortunately it was kept back by the very heaviness of its masses of clouds. They had reached the banks of the Somme when the first lightning flash parted the clouds above the church of Saint-Valery, a brutal, blinding flash, followed by such a crash of thunder that the frightened children hid their faces in their mothers' skirts.

With one voice they shouted for help. Where was the ferryman? Was the man paid by the town to do nothing, to sleep comfortably dry while travellers were drowned in the storm?

"It is no new thing for us to be wet," said the thin voice of Mother Loirat. "Are we not always

drenched by the tides? You are too fond of an easy life. Wait a little, my daughters, you will find times grow harder as you grow older."

These reflections did not stop their outcry. The storm enveloped all the bay. As they stood on the banks of the stream, too deep for them to cross, exposed to its fury, the group of crying children and clamoring women seemed, with their angry voices, cries, and their shrinking attitudes like shipwrecked seals.

"Are you going to wait there until you are dry?" cried, from behind, a cheerful voice. "You must have a good many clothes to wash."

"Whom are you mocking, you great sea-gull? Are you not as soaked as the rest? This is a nice time for you to be taking your Lise for a walk."

When Silvere and Elise joined the group of women and children there was an exchange of words, and explanations without end.

"What brought you on our wet tracks with your Lise?"

Elise, who had been half-hidden behind Silvere's shoulder, stepped forward to reply. The night before, on her return, she had received a message, and an order to present herself at the Maritime Bureau the next morning at six o'clock, on a matter referring to her father. Like all poor people, she had, to save the fare of the boat which crossed at full tide, preferred to walk, taking advantage of the ebb. This took six hours from her sleep, but she



"ARE YOU GOING TO WAIT THERE UNTIL YOU ARE DRY?"

would not lose in a twenty minutes' trip a whole day's wages.

All this time nothing appeared on the other bank. With a man's authority, Silvere gave his advice. Since no one came to help them, they had better follow the stream to the place where the boats lay at anchor. They would be less wretched there, if they could not find any one to ferry them across to the town.

CHAPTER XX.

THE wharf was as busy a scene as if it had been midday. Among the brigs and schooners unloading wood from Norway, the women were not long in making out a strange-looking steamer. She did not have paddles like a tug, she was shorter than a despatch-boat, and not so sharp as a corvette. Her deck was loaded with rope ladders, with long tubes, and strange dresses. On her davits hung boats such as were ordinarily found only on larger vessels, —a big ship's boat, and a steam-launch.

"Look there, Elise, this surely has something to do with your father. You can see visors such as divers wear."

The steamer had really come in answer to Elise's petition, which had reached the Maritime Prefect at Dunkirk at a time when trials of diving apparatus were about to be made. They wished to experiment at different depths, to investigate the character of the seas, to test dangerous whirlpools, eddies, and contrary currents. The rough waters of Berck and Etaples had been selected for the experiment. The search which Elise asked for gave an opportunity for practice. It was a sort of practical problem, the solution of which would confirm scientific theories. The steamer had then naturally been ordered to put herself in communication with the

Bureau at Saint-Valery, to obtain the additional information necessary to its work.

The experiments were to commence at the next tide, and all the town had waked up well before its usual hour. At the quay, on the river bank, on the side of the town near the steamer, which was already smoking, groups of sailors were talking excitedly. Among them the women speedily recognized their husbands, more interested in listening than in seeing their families. They hardly turned their heads at the call which Silvere threw at them from the opposite pier.

Nevertheless, a service boat came alongside, and a few moments afterward mothers, wives, and children joined the men. Their embraces were short. Their hearts were stirred only by this great news: the Vergoyer was to be explored.

A legend had grown from age to age about this gulf, to which each year added fresh victims. The names of those who had been lost there with their boats had been told over and over so often that it had come to be believed that, from generation to generation, since the ages, enormous riches had been piling up in this accursed gulf. Had not, only two springs before, after a storm from the north, one of those storms when the sea cuts away the sands, a lugger from Cayeux, buried more than thirty years before, been thrown up and floated? It was found aground on its side, as strong as when new. Other wrecks had been thrown up with it, and with them an old box stuffed with pistoles, which had made the finder rich.

This old shipwrecked lugger, which had taken a fresh lease of life, after having so long a lapse, had since led a happy existence. She had all the boldness of one brought back to life, one who had been in the realms of death, and thereafter feared nothing. The captain who bought her faced the roughest weather in her. How many others might, like her, be recovered, good for use? There was no doubt that they would find treasures enough to fill the pockets of all the coasters of the bay, and every man hoped to take part in the work.

Perhaps they might be hired. They were not familiar with the work, but was it necessary for one to have studied much to know how to put on a visor and dig in the wet sand? If one should find a box of gold like that other, one would be rich enough to fit out a big fishing-boat and be a captain in one's turn. And it is much pleasanter to be a captain than a hand.

The sailors urged one another to go to the officers of the steamer and find out if work was offered, and under what conditions they would have a chance to be taken.

They did not stop talking for an instant, and talking is dry work, so they soon entered the first open tavern, and there talked on, very much at their ease, before their full bowls of hot coffee. The children lay asleep on the benches or in the corners. The sun had risen long ago, but they had not yet decided who should go and ask the officers.

"Let's find Lise," cried one of the big fellows,

with moist lips and bright eyes. Three cups of coffee had rubbed up his ideas.

As one man they overturned the benches, and, swallowing at a gulp what was left in their cups, dashed out of the tavern to find Elise.

She was seated at the door of the Bureau, on the first of three steps where, for whole days during the last weeks, she had waited so often for the commissaire to come out. But where yesterday she was so unhappy, she was to-day full of new hopes.

The wives of the two big fellows were the first to arrive, dragging their children off their feet beside them, and urging their husbands to ask the young girl's help. They shouted and gestured, as if counting on noise to prove their prior rights. While all talked wildly around Elise, the old sailor, who had kept back, was attacked by his two older daughters.

They urged that he, too, should try to get work on the steamer; if there were treasures to be found, it would be too stupid to leave them to other people. He did not yield easily, and the nearer the time came to act the more he hesitated. For his part, he had seen enough misery on top of the water, without going underneath in search of it. At his age he had no taste for convict's work.

But by his resistance he only increased the urgency of his daughters, who grew frantic in their attempts to convince him. Mother Loirat heard them. She was so angry that she interposed:

"The old man is right, it is no work for honest men. Every one despises miscreants who get rich by stealing dead men's money."

Then she went to Elise:

"Do not try to help them, my child. All they want is to steal the money of those who have been shipwrecked."

"Have no fear, good Mother Loirat. I have not given the money a thought. All I want is to free the soul of my father and your three sons. You and Chrétien will go. You have the right which your tears have given you."

A feeling of rage and disappointment passed through the crowd of sailors, furious at the contempt which Elise showed for them. They began to growl out threats.

"Ahoy there, sailors, clear the road for your betters. Ahoy!" The big fellows and all the women turned about at the sharp, impertinent voice which demanded room so cavalierly.

"A ship's figure-head on a seal's skeleton! Wretched bundle! He shall not pass! the baboon! he is all humps and no hollows."

The little clerk struggled, and Elise made a dash forward to clear the way to the Bureau for him, when suddenly the sailors fell back of themselves. Between their two files, drawn back respectfully, came the under-commissaire, very dignified in his silver-laced hat. He recognized Elise.

"You are not late; it is well. Pass in before me."

Elise hesitated. She looked about for Silvere, who had gone to the quay to make inquiries. She wanted to wait for him. Could she dare face alone and unaided the majesty of the Bureau? The chief

pushed her forward, then he went in after her, and was followed by the little clerk, who slammed the door furiously in the faces of the dumfounded sailors.

The commissaire was punctual. The last stroke of six was just sounding.

Some minutes after the door opened. The clerk reappeared, and from the top of the three steps overlooked the crowd of sailors arrogantly. He held a roll of papers in his hand and struck an attitude, as if about to read something important. All eyes grew large, all mouths opened in fixed attention. He unrolled his paper and spread it out; when he saw that they were taken in by his trick he put it back in his pocket, and said quietly:

"Is Silvere Pollenne among you, please?"

All faces lengthened with disappointment. Silvere had just that moment returned from the quay. He followed the clerk into the office, and the door slammed furiously a second time before the dazed looks of the sailors.

It opened again a quarter of an hour later. The little clerk came out, entirely hidden behind an enormous register which aroused fresh hopes. They needed men without doubt. They would make those sign the book whom they engaged.

They began to push one another about, to be first. There was a delay of at least three minutes, then the book was closed, and the imperturbable clerk shrilly, but just loud enough to be heard, called out:

"Mme. Loirat and Chrétien Loirat, will you have

the kindness to answer? You are requested to enter."

They went in together, and the door closed after them with two slams more irritating than a box on the ears.

"He despises us, does he, this baboon?" Sailors, children, above all the women, picked up stones, resolved to punish this insolent fellow if he dared show himself. All hands were raised, when they heard the noise of the door open. They dropped immediately.

The commissaire came out, with Elise at his side; behind her Silvere, Chrétien, Mother Loirat, and finally M. Emile, the little clerk. He moved his hump about delightedly, did M. Emile, as he passed before the big sailors, proud as a king's fool before the courtiers. He had the body of a child and, notwithstanding his great high, shiny silk hat, he did not come up to the sailors' shoulders. He walked along no less pompously on that account, bursting with impertinent pride.

"There! Pick that up if you wish to move your hump!"

Two blows had knocked his high hat into the mud. It was a signal for the sailors to stampede. They set off in haste, while M. Emile stood still, gazing after his injured headpiece. He was a truly piteous spectacle, as he looked at it all crushed out of shape. Tears came to his eyes, which became more lack-lustre than ever. Fortunately Elise saw him. She ran and picked up his hat, brushed and set it right, and put it on.

"I wore it to please you, Mlle. Elise. These rustics are jealous at my fine appearance."

"Come quickly! Your chief is scowling. I tremble for you."

They joined the under-commissaire, who turned his head quietly and said shortly:

"I have been thinking, M. Emile, and I have no further need for you. Return to the Bureau. We will talk matters over to-night."

"Oh, sir," Elise begged, "forgive him. It is not his fault. It is his misfortune."

The under-commissaire did not appear to hear her. He continued his route toward the quay where the steamer was anchored.

CHAPTER XXI.

IT was seven o'clock by the sun when the steamer came into the waters of the Vergoyer. A perfect fleet followed it. They had come from Cayeux, Hourdel, Berck, Crotoy, even from Treport, and, perhaps, Etaples. Nowadays news travels far by telegraph, and, thanks to the connection between the Maritime Bureaus, word was scattered far and wide that they were going to explore the gulf; that the living were to see with their own eyes the abode of the dead.

Like so many birds of prey after a wounded whale, boats of all sizes and all rigs, sloops, barges, luggers, *flambarts*, followed in the wake of the steamer. They were all after plunder, all hoping to get rich easily. Divers often used explosives at the bottom of the sea to break up wrecks, and then the *débris* floated. If they came across any such wreckage, it might be very valuable.

Elise was on the bridge of the steamer with the captain. Having told how the night before she and Silvere had discovered the lost sailors' gulf, she was directed to lay their course to their float.

The captain, a handsome, white-haired old man, passed her orders to the man at the wheel, who steered accordingly.

Elise's dress made a strong contrast with the gold-

laced suits of the officers who surrounded her, but among all these grave faces she seemed none the less dignified nor beautiful. Her white neckerchief, on her dark waist, caught the sunlight, as if to emphasize her emotion, and her face was full of sweetness. One would have said that an emanation from her soul floated about her like an aureole, clothing her in all the grace of a new hope.

The steamer went its way, followed by the fleet of white, brown, gray, and red sails. It seemed, with this army which followed it, as if advancing to certain victory. And it was Elise who led all these people to the conquest of the Vergoyer.

"Stop her!" The steamer lay motionless. The large launch was put into the water, then the other boats and the long-boat, in which Elise took her place with the commissaire and the principal officers.

"Captain, if you will look to larboard, you can see our float."

It lay two cable-lengths away, and became at once the center of action. The captain shouted orders in all directions through his trumpet, and each boat took its position for work around the frail float, which, tossed roughly by the waves, seemed a prey hunted down by a ring of fishing-boats.

The launch came into the wind close abreast of it.

Facing her, just far enough away not to interfere in the work, lay the long-boat, and beside it another, in which were Silvere, Chrétien, and Mother Loirat. They were like two galleries of spectators—the officers sitting in judgment, and the relatives waiting the revelations of this strange search.

The launch and the large boats were anchored. Further away, making up the circle, several boats lay on their oars, ready to answer any sudden call. After the soundings had been verified as sixty fathoms, the divers began to work. Elise's heart beat wildly. Over the side of the launch was unrolled into the sea a rope ladder, which seemed long enough to reach the center of the earth. So many rounds were paid out, and disappeared under the waves in endless succession, that it seemed as if it would descend into eternity. Still twenty-five fathoms and one hundred steps to pay out. Never had living man gone to such depths to search for the dead. Elise shivered to her very marrow.

The unrolling of the ladder stopped. A man stepped over the side of the boat, dressed in a suit of rubber with a head-piece having squares of glass and two tubes in it. He had more than an inch of lead on each of his shoes. It was to help him descend into the abyss.

Unfortunate man! He seized the first rounds and touched the water. He began to descend—his feet, his legs, the lower part of his body disappeared beneath the waves. Misery! All the stuff of his suit puffed up on his shoulders as if it were his skin which had swollen. For one instant it seemed as if he stopped, hesitating, as if the gulf pushed him back and would none of him.

"Stop him!" cried Elise. "I wish above everything to find my father, but it is not right to make another lose his life on my account. I will make the descent. Order him back, captain."

Why did all the officers hear this innocent demand from Elise with a smile? Was it wrong to wish to snatch an innocent man from an abyss? She had seen her father so unhappy in those depths. Was it necessary for others to lose their lives, also, and unnecessarily? Barnabé, too; he was there since yesterday.

"Captain, I beg you, order the man back. I wish to take his place."

"No, not you," cried Chrétien, "I will go, Ma'm-selle Elise."

But all these offers were made in vain. The diver was out of sight; only the tremblings of the ladder, and the paying out of safety cords and the tube, showed that he was descending. Bubbles of air broke suddenly by the hundred about them.

"Oh, captain, look! it is just like a drowning man."

"Be quiet," cried Mother Loirat. "Let the man attend to his business, and do you attend to yours. Women should not interfere with men who are at work."

The ladder stopped shaking, the paying out ceased, and the lieutenant in charge in the launch spoke, and then listened at the end of one of the tubes. He gave orders to the four sailors, who had been steadily working a pump. Then he went on listening and speaking, stopping at intervals, to give out orders. By his direction a great lantern was lowered by a tackle, which lighted up the seas like the rays of the sun. At the same time, from the boat's side, ropes were paid out, one with an arm-

ful of tubes, picks, pickaxes, and shovels ; the other with an empty sack, which came up less than a quarter of an hour afterward, filled with sand—that sand under which Elise's father was lying.

The talking through the tubes began again. Soon a second tackle was rigged, from which swung an iron cask, which was lowered into the sea. Then a new pump worked, and there was a half hour during which Elise leaned over the abyss, exhausted with watching and frightened by hopes and fears.

At a signal from the depths, the lieutenant called :
“ Hoist the cask ! ”

The pulley of the tackle turned many times under the rope. It hardly creaked. It seemed to be lifting no weight at all. At last they saw the cask below the surface, with a shadow so long that it seemed to reach the bottom. “ Halt ! ” The cask is at the surface.

“ Look after the wreckage ! ” cried the captain through his trumpet, and two little boats left their station in the circle and placed themselves one on either side of the tackle.

“ Hoist ! ” The cask rose, with the water streaming from it like a fountain. Instantly the cordage bit the pulley, which began to creak dolorously. “ Halt ! ” The block stopped. It was held rigidly by the great weight below it.

“ Make the wreckage fast ! ” When the little boats had done this, the cask was swung inward and its burden was aboard the launch.

“ What is it ? ” cried the captain.

“ A mizzen sail—two dead bodies in it.”

The officers uncovered, and bowed their heads devoutly.

"Alongside!" ordered the captain, as he put on his hat. "Alongside!"

By his cheerful voice one could see that he was well satisfied.

His instructions were exact. To make experiments with the improved apparatus at depths hitherto unexplored, to study the comparative influence of pressure, the action of eddies and currents on the movements of divers, to find whether the sand was solid or movable, to establish, in a word, a sort of chart for the use of submarine investigations in these dangerous waters; such had been the captain's task, a sort of preparatory investigation, with which the search for dead bodies had only been indirectly connected.

Happily these experiments had been terminated sooner than he had hoped. He had been directed, if it were advisable, to accede to Elise's petition, but he had not thought this detail of much importance, as it seemed to him entirely foreign to the scientific side of the matter. But the results had been so favorable that, in less than an hour of work, the men whom he had been ordered to look for had been found.

"Well, my daughter, are you satisfied? You see they have found your father. Are you satisfied?"

"It is not my father, captain. It is Barnabé of Crotoy, and his uncle from Saint-Valery. They were capsized here only yesterday. My father lies under the sand."

The old officer frowned. So much the worse. After all, drowned men are all alike. They had brought back two bodies from a depth of sixty fathoms. The question was as satisfactorily proved by these as it would have been by the others. Was one to dig for eight days in one place when there was so much to explore?

Besides, the sky made him anxious. The wind, which for three days had been uncertain, and which had passed from north to south by way of east, showed an inclination to return to the north by way of west, making thus a complete circuit. It was an ominous sign. When the wind amuses itself, let the sailor have a care.

"Lieutenant, are your experiments finished? Yes? Order the man up."

Elise rose in revolt.

"But my father, captain. Are you not going to look for him? Now that the man is on the bottom, it will be very little trouble to dig in the sand."

"Order the man up!"

"Captain, make him dig instead. If he comes up, is he to go down again?"

The captain snapped his fingers impatiently. He was not accustomed to resistance to his authority, and habits of discipline had given him that shortness of manner which distinguishes sailors aboard ship.

"Be quiet, my daughter. You did not wish to let him go down a moment ago, and now you do not wish him to come up. Caprice cannot govern a ship. Lieutenant, order the man up."

Elise was desperate. All her strength left her suddenly. She sank down, with clasped hands and uplifted look. Two tears, gliding slowly from her soft, black eyes stopped, trembling, on her lashes, and, sparkling in the sunlight, seemed to witness the depth of her disappointment.

She had hoped so much from this visit to the Vergoyer. She would accomplish her task. She would acquit her debt to her father. She would gain his pardon and would earn her reward, she would see Firmin again. This result, so long delayed, won by so many efforts and sufferings, was denied her; it was snatched from her at the moment when she held it, as it were, in her hand.

“Captain, listen. If the man comes up I wish to go down. If he does not dare to dig, I will. I will dare everything for——”

Choked by a sob, she could not finish. The diver had returned, and, freed from his head-piece, talked freely and gave in a strong voice the details of his descent.

At that depth he had been hardly able to walk, even with his pick as a walking-stick. He had been moved about like one who floats aimlessly and lightly, his equilibrium lost, fearing constantly that he would turn feet upward. He had been obliged to make the shovel fast to the lower part of one leg and the pickaxe to the other, and drag them behind him like two anchors, to keep a foothold on the sand. It was only in this way that he had managed to walk. He had found the wreck near him. It was there by itself. He had seen another, without

doubt a vessel's hull, a little further off, but he had not dared to go so far. At sixty fathoms one could not count on his equilibrium.

Besides these two wrecks there was nothing but sand. The bottom spread out like a flat valley at the foot of a mountain-peak. The smooth surface was raised in places by little mounds, on which the sand seemed firmer than it was around them. Just where he had descended, at the place marked by the anchor which Silvere had dropped the night before, the man had come on one of these mounds which seemed to him higher than the others. He had dug a yard downward without discovering anything, but had not been able to go further because the wet sand filled the hole as fast as he dug.

"You hear what he says," said the captain, turning toward Elise. "We are not equipped for this kind of work. Excavators are needed. I will speak of it in my report to the Minister."

"The Minister is a long way off," said Elise, "and we are here. Let me go down."

"Say no more," said the captain rudely. "Haul the ladder aboard."

"No," cried Elise, exasperated. "If you take up the ladder, I will throw myself overboard. It is too cowardly to have come here to investigate, and go away without finding anything."

"We have brought up two bodies."

"Neither of them is my father. You were ordered here to search for him. If you abandon the work, at least let me go on with it. You have two suits. Silvere will go down with me."

"Let me take your place, Ma'mselle Elise," cried Chrétien. "I should always feel ashamed if you were lost. If I reach the bottom I will dig hard, remembering that I am doing it to please you."

"Lise is right," added Mother Loirat, "people who are in trouble must help themselves."

The captain, giddy at all these demands, stamped the deck impatiently.

"Let them have their way. Bring the small boat alongside." It took on board Elise, Silvere, and Chrétien, and carried them to the launch.

"The girl goes first."

"No! let me," said the two men, with one voice, "me—me."

"The girl first. Hurry, lieutenant."

There was no answer possible. The captain had his reasons for not yielding. Wishing to put an end, as quickly as possible, to the claims of these rustics, he sent Elise first, with the secret hope that the deadening effect of the compressed air would bring a girl to terms more quickly than men used to painful exposures. In this way, one trip alone would suffice to discourage all these would-be divers.

Elise slipped off her dress, wrapping her skirt about each knee, and put on the rubber suit, except the head-piece. Her face, with its fine profile, stood out haughtily above this strange armour, and showed not a tremor when the sailor came to put on the visor with its four squares of glass.

The head-piece was screwed down on its frame. How it weighed on her shoulders! The heavy folds

of the collar and sleeves prevented her from moving her arms. Her feet can never lift those leaden soles.

"Are you ready to descend?"

Who was speaking to her? Elise has lost her individuality. She is nothing but an inert will, the soul of a machine. Without stopping to think, she finds herself on the ladder, drawn down by the heavy weights.

Who holds up her feet? There is no longer any weight in their soles. Something supports them. When will she enter the water? She will know, by its chill, when she touches it. No. She is under the water. Through the largest light in her visor she sees the waves about her. She is giddy. Who whistled in her ears? It sounded like the wind!

"Open the valve of the head-piece."

No matter who it is who orders it, she obeys unconsciously. Misery! What a fright she has! There is a deafening rumble. Have the tubes burst, and is the water coming in upon her? She cannot think, her temples throb, there is a band about her forehead. Her skin is burning, her whole face feels pin-pricked! There are noises and sharp whistles in her ears! She gasps and strangles.

"Do you want to come up? Shall you be able to go to the bottom? You are not a quarter of the way yet."

What will she find at the end of this endless ladder? Elise no longer feels what she touches; neither the rounds of the ladder in her hands, nor the head-piece on her shoulders.

"Do you not want to come back? Open the valve of the head-piece. Have no fear of the noise. It is only the air escaping."

She was careful to obey. She was conscious of nothing, neither of him who spoke, nor of what, nor how. But to hear another's voice was to be not alone, and without that companionship would she have had the boldness to go on into these glassy depths? What a vivid light this was about her, and what strange forms whisked suddenly by her!

She wished the voice would speak again. She had neither body nor weight. She seemed to float as a bird in air. There was nothing above her head, nothing under her feet. She felt nothing except shooting pains in her head. She kept on descending mechanically without knowing where it would bring her, or that the descent would ever end.

"Open the valve!"

At this command Elise woke suddenly from her stupor. She felt the rounds of the ladder which she held tightly. She was herself again. The pain in her head ceased.

"Attention! You are just reaching the bottom."

It seemed to her that she had come to a land of sunlight. What dazzling gleams came through the lights of her visor. She had to close her eyes. A great lantern hung close to her, as powerful as that of a light-house. The depths shone joyously. How delighted she was after the night, the interminable night, to see clearly again. She regained her confidence when she found herself once more on her

feet, with her shadow; her own familiar shadow, on which one depends as if it were something tangible.

How brightly the sand sparkled. The dead, whose cold remains it keeps, ought to be charmed with these bright gleams which presage their coming return to the light of day. Doubtless her father has felt the soft warmth of its rays, and has started in his wet prison. He is here, under these sands which for three months have served him as a winding-sheet, while he awaits his final burial.

But is it not impious to tramp about these sands which cover the dead? Is it not like walking over graves?

On her knees, with joined hands, Elise, in a pious revery, hears nothing; not the distant rumblings which re-echo from space to space in these limitless depths, nor the voice which calls her:

"Remount! A storm is coming. The captain gives you only five minutes. We are going to sail."

She hears nothing, for she is praying. All her thoughts are with him whom she hopes soon to find.

"Father, if I have not looked for you earlier, it is not because I have failed in respect or loving memories. I remember, when a little thing on your knees, your laughing talk and speaking eyes. I have not forgotten them; nor how you taught Firmin and me, in your boat. You had an angry voice, but a warm heart."

"Are you not coming back, then? The captain will not wait."

"Father, when you left us, I kept your memory in



"FATHER, IF YOU WILL HELP, I WILL FIND YOU."

my heart; since you have come back to me in visions, I have suffered with you."

"Make haste. We are taking up the anchor. The captain is just the man to go without you."

"Father, if you will help, I will find you——"

Is it the force of the current which lifts her? She clings to the sand, digs her soles into it, clutches it with her hands. It is night again. The lantern has disappeared. Without a light how can she see to dig the sands, how be courageous enough to wait in this darkness in the midst of the frightful noise of the waves?

She cannot hear the voice now. She calls. She is alone in this abyss of water. Yet ought she to leave her father, to tear herself away at the moment when she is about to find him? Where is the ladder? She tries to seize it, her hands clutch only the void. What agitations stir this under ocean! Everything is whirling in these infernal depths. The surges break on the sand with terrible crashings, they tear it up, dig into it, and toss it about pitilessly. Poor father!

Elise is overturned. Rolled head over heels, stricken by this great upheaval, she loses consciousness, while the wild eddies spin her around and around.

The launch had been made fast on the deck of the steamer, which was running at full speed. Elise was not yet freed from the diver's dress. She had a rush of blood to the head which stupefied, blinded, and

deafened her, when the visor was removed and she breathed the fresh air. When at last she came to herself she saw Silvere and Chrétien bending anxiously over her, while the lieutenant was saying :

“What were you thinking of to stay below in the face of such a storm? Were you trying to play at obstinacy with the captain? He had given the order to cut the cord and tubes. Fortunately for you, the safety rope was strong.”

CHAPTER XXII.

NEVER had such a following sea driven a boat as that which, in less than a quarter of an hour, was hurrying the steamer to Treport. It was a real gale from the north.

The sea was in the wildest commotion, the waves leaping, plunging, and breaking madly upon one another. Entering the channel of Saint-Valery was not to be thought of. In heavy weather the Bay of Somme is impracticable. They had, therefore, laid their course direct to Treport.

They left behind them, as they flew on, many small craft which could hardly hope to outlive the gale. All those who had followed the steamer to the Vergoyer had fled, like sea-gulls before a storm, at the first sign of danger from the north. Were they all safely in port that night?

Built for rough weather, the steamer, in spite of the tempest, soon reached the quay at Treport. The moment they landed Elise, Silvere, Chrétien, and Mother Loirat hurried to the point at the foot of the light-house, to watch other boats enter. But not one was to be seen on the horizon. Captains choose to run before the wind, rather than to risk going ashore and breaking up. A boat cannot avoid a bar or a point as she would, and even if she enters the harbor she has still the piers to fear.

She can dash herself to pieces on these as easily as a dish on a tavern floor.

But in the north-east, there was a rag of sail lashed by the mad winds. They could see it for an instant, then it would disappear. Just as they had made up their minds that it must have gone down, it would reappear. Elise watched it with greater uneasiness than the others, for she herself, in a storm as wild as this, had realized how strong the sea is and how weak a boat.

"Silvere, a seaman's is a risky trade. But how the sea speaks to the soul. It is more beautiful than ever when it is so angry. I am more afraid of it here than if I were fighting it. One fears less for those exposed to it, if one is working with them."

A sailor interrupted her. He had orders to bring Elise to the steamer, where the officials were waiting to see her.

Never had she had such a joyful surprise. As he had promised Florimond, the under-commissaire of Treport had made all enquiries possible about Firmin. Finding his colleague from Saint-Valery on board the steamer, he had communicated to him the results which he had just learned.

Firmin had been met drifting in the *flambart's* boat, nearly dying. He had been two days without food. It was a government cruiser that had picked him up. For ten days he had been in the delirium of fever, but with good care he had got well again, and was now no longer a ship's boy, but as hardy as an able seaman.

He lived in the top, running along the yards as another man would walk the deck. He was always the first in places of danger, in furling the sails or taking a reef, always on the lookout to be first to answer the boatswain's whistle. The letter which carried the news of his safety gave these details of his good conduct aboard.

Firmin had at last realized his ambition. With the innocence of a child he had always believed that everybody must be rich on one of these great ships, which he had sometimes seen when at sea with their shining decks and their well-polished brasses. He had promised himself to some day try his fortune. Elise should not have to work long for him. He would engage on one of these big ships, where he would become a real sailor, and have a coat with gold buttons for holidays. So that fortune, in putting him on the corvette, served his turn exactly.

Elise recognized Firmin in all that the commissaire said. He was always so ready, so anxious for rough experiences and fresh opportunities.

"Where is he, sir? Can I go to him? Silvere will go with me."

But Firmin was far away. The news had come from Iceland. The corvette had anchored for some weeks in the roadstead of Reikjavik, and had sent her despatches by some vessel leaving for Europe.

Iceland! That island without trees and roads, where the fogs are as thick in the valleys as lakes; where the horses have to brush aside the snow to get at the grass; where the people live like the

dead, in houses dug in the ground. Her father had visited Iceland in old times, when he was in the navy. He had accompanied one of the officers far inland to see the snow-clad mountains, which vomit fire and sulphur. He had nearly lost his life, but Elise was not anxious, for all that. Firmin was better at facing dangers than her father. She had no fears for him on that score.

From Iceland, where she had gone to look after the cod-fishers, the corvette was to return to the Scotch seas to protect the herring fishers. She would not, therefore, return home before the end of the autumn campaign, in the first days of December.

"Then I will go to meet him," said Elise. "I have no right to be unhappy, since the lad has found the place he likes. He will make a fine sailor."

She seemed so sweet and gentle that the commissaire was quite won over. He promised to find the place where the steamer would make her headquarters, and to help Elise in all possible ways.

"Thanks, sir. You are very kind. The boy is high-spirited, he is worth helping."

Yes, soon she would have her Firmin in her arms, pressed to her heart as of old. She would see him again, only handsomer and stronger. To go to him she would engage herself with Silvere on big Poi-devin's boat. She would ask no wages but her food. Why should he not take her, for she was strong and had no longer the reputation of bringing bad luck. But some one was calling her.

From the pier Chrétien was shouting at the top of his voice :

“ Ma’mselle Elise, Ma’mselle Elise ! The little sail is coming in. She is a lugger from Cayeux. She has the bodies of my three brothers. Mother Loirat has fainted from terror ! ”

And overcome with excitement, he kept on repeating, as he caught his breath : “ Ma’mselle Elise, Ma’mselle Elise ! ”

“ I am coming, Chrétien. Give me a moment to tell the commissaire.”

Then turning toward Silvere, Elise took his arm.

“ Come with me. My courage never fails when I am near you.”

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The lugger was anchored in the harbor, her bow standing out of the water, her taffrail nearly on a level with it. When they had all reached her, the two commissaires, Elise, Chrétien, Silvere, and others, besides a number of little boats at the lugger’s stern, set to work to lift something lashed there which hung deep in the water.

Ho ! hiss ! It is heavy. Have a care. The boats will be dragged under. Halt ! Three pairs of great boots come to the surface.

“ Mother Loirat, they are your sons. You must calm yourself and stand, out of respect to them.”

On her knees beside the old woman, Elise cried to her :

“ Are you not happy ? Your sons’ troubles are over forever.”

The old woman opened her eyes at last, at the

moment when the bodies of her three sons were laid on the pier. Death had not dared to separate them. They were together, and in that last embrace in which they had entered into the darkness of the abyss. A sail, which chance had wrapped about them, had protected them and served as a winding-sheet, the true winding-sheet of a sailor. The furious waves had respected their last embrace.

They had been found by the lugger in the very height of the storm, and she had made fast to them. Running before the wind at random, not knowing whether to take the open sea or try for port, she had come upon this melancholy wreck, which seemed to her crew like a presage of their own death. They had tried to avoid it, not wishing to embarrass themselves with a dead weight, but it would not be left. It followed after in her wake, it pursued her, and through superstitious fears they had decided to make it fast. It had thus been towed in spite of the storm, and it was this which had saved them. For it had borne the brunt of the waves, and had made smoother seas about them, by acting as a breakwater. Like a rudder it had kept the boat to the wind, and, thanks to it, she had made port, while many of her fellows would never enter it again.

The three brothers were laid on the quay. Their faces were calm and unchanged.

“My poor lads!—my sons!”

And the old woman fainted again in the arms of Elise.

“Listen, dear Mother Loirat. Rouse yourself.

Your sons are at rest. My father will find rest as well. The time of his return has come. He will have his money in his pocket—you know the pocket of his woollen jersey—in his sealskin purse. He was so proud when he brought it home full. It made a great lump on his chest, just over his heart. He will come back rich, good Mother Loirat, and I will give you all the money. You shall have no more trouble."

The old woman did not hear her. She did not recover consciousness until night, in a bed in the tavern, with Elise and Chrétien on either side of her. Silvere was on guard beside the three bodies, in a shed belonging to the coast guard, waiting the end of the official formalities. He passed the last hours of the day and all night in this mournful watch, where, to distract his gloomy thoughts, he had the whistling of the wind and the angry roaring of the sea. At last, when the first gleams of dawn came, the storm passed away.

It passed, but it had been so violent, and had so torn up the sands, that it had thrown ashore the bodies of all who lay in the lost sailors' gulf.

Hénin was found as if asleep in his boat, which seemed as if it remembered the way home. The sea gave him back as it had taken him, stretched in his berth, his lips smiling, his eyes closed. Around him in the forecastle, under the watery covering which had protected them from the teeth of time, slept his companions, whom death had surprised in sleep.

The boat was as uninjured as they whom it had protected. And when the gale from the north set her free, she was ready to take up work as boldly as ever.

Thrown up from the sands, and driven forward by the waves, she had been caught in the current of the bay, and, pushed on by blow after blow, had gone ashore at almost the spot on the beach where, some days before, Elise had tried to die, invoking her father's memory. The father had come in answer to his daughter's call.

She was not there to receive him, but Barbet, whom his mistress had left in the village, wandering along the dunes, welcomed with joyous cries the return of the old man, who brought back with him the peace and happiness of his daughter.

All came ashore one after the other: friend Joseph, and Amédée, and many others who had gone so long that they had been forgotten. They were found all along the coast between Calais and Fécamp.

This gale has never been forgotten. In all the country around it is known as "The Martyrs' Storm."

Three days passed. The storm had cleared away entirely. The wind was steady in the north-east, betokening settled weather. The sea reflected the tender blue of the sky, and all the bay was bright with changing hues, while across it stood out the sombre mass of Saint-Valery. Above the dunes, in soft lines, a few white clouds raced along, the last

of their kind; as if to show that the heavens were being swept clean by the winds.

Nothing could equal the brightness of this August morning. On the road that climbed the dune, a green triumphal arch was raised, for the village was celebrating the liberation of her children.

All the dead whom the sea had given up were laid together in the little low room of the *mairie*. Twenty-three! Brought together again, some by boats, others in carts, according to where they had been found.

Twenty-three! Not one was missing at the roll-call, and they had had to wait for the last—the lame man, who, being the lightest, had been carried furthest by the waves.

In the memory of the old men there had never been so joyful a holiday in the village. The *mairie* was adorned with flags and garlands of flowers, while the houses were dressed in white stuff, and with bouquets. Here and there beacons, adorned with branches, marked the route of the procession.

Twenty-three coffins. All the strong men of the place were needed to carry them. With its white drapings and crowns of radiant flowers, one might have truly called it a triumphal procession. The first place was given to Hénin, who was wrapped in a flag. Two lines of young girls, in long white veils, with baskets on their arms, scattered roses in the way.

Elise and Barbet walked first, in advance of the mayor. Preceding by a few steps the long proces-

sion of villagers, they seemed as if guiding this happy band of mourners.

The great gate of the cemetery, with a cross raised on either side, stood open to receive them, and when the August sun, high overhead, marked midday, the hour of rest, the twenty-three were laid to sleep in consecrated ground.

That night, as she entered her cabin with Barbet, Elise had no fears of seeing her father's ghost. Surely he was at peace, lying beside her mother in the corner of the graveyard. A new cross was over him, with a beautiful inscription, in letters carefully cut out and painted.

"Father, are you at peace at last? Come and tell me. I wish to wipe out of my memory your worn features and reproachful looks. I wish to see again your sweet and loving face."

But her father did not appear. Nothing now troubled his peaceful rest. Barbet understood it. He placed his paws on Elise's knees, and looked into her eyes, trying to say :

"Friend, do not awake sleeping spirits. The time has come to take up your life again, to go to those who need you, to summon those of whom you have need."

Barbet was right. Elise was no longer alone in the world. The happy hour was at hand when she would take her brother in her arms, the hour when she would give herself to her betrothed.

CHAPTER XXIII.

FATHER HÉNIN had come back to earth with money in his pocket. His round purse was really like a great ball in the pocket of his jersey, just over the place where his heart once beat so warmly. After a slight refitting his boat was ready for use.

Elise had no thought of keeping all these riches for herself. Was it necessary for her to be so careful, now that she was to be married? She wished to lay away Firmin's share simply, and to use the rest in making the last days of Mother Loirat more happy. The poor old woman was still ill; her exhausted forces would, perhaps, never recover from this last blow they had received. Money is most necessary in such cases.

Unfortunately, the authorities had seized everything, with a view of protecting the rights of the heirs, so that Elise's plans were interfered with before she was able to carry them out.

Since the return of Silvere she had been very happy. She accepted help from her lover as if he were already her husband. When two people determine to marry, ought they not to share good and bad alike? Their wedding could not take place until after the end of the autumn cruise, because big Poidevin would not allow his men an hour more than he had promised, and the sailing of the *Jeune-*

Adolphine was announced for the night before the full moon, three days away.

At first Silvere had wanted to break his engagement with Poidevin, and remain at home until he could marry Elise. After that he would take the first boat for the Scotch seas and join Firmin. But Silvere was an excellent sailor, a hard worker, silent, sober, and prudent, and his captain had refused to release him.

"I cannot bear the idea of leaving you alone, Elise. You will go to live with Mother Pilote?"

"No, Silvere. You know that while I have accepted help from you as if you were my husband, I should not be willing to accept it from another. Mother Pilote would despise me if I were to ask her to support me. I am not afraid of work. I would rather sail with you. Big Poidevin would take me, I am sure."

Since the time when she had led the funeral cortége in advance of the mayor, Elise was held in high respect in the village. Not only had they forgotten, as she herself had forgotten, the insults with which they had pursued her, but they now praised her as if she were the cause of all the bodies having come ashore. She had worked hard, and, if they adjudged her that honor, might she not fairly accept it? Nevertheless, she accepted only a small part of the praise they gave her. Her one desire was to make an engagement with Poidevin.

Without further delay she dragged Silvere to the wharf, near which she was sure to meet the big captain. Ordinarily he was loafing on the pier, or

more likely was sitting in the sailors' tavern. They looked for him first at the waterside. Two coast guards set them on his track.

"Poidevin? You need never look for him near water, his nose is always over the grog."

He was drinking, as they soon found. As they entered the tavern door, Elise shivered. She recalled the scenes that had taken place there so little time before; the hatred of Florimond and his sailors; and Barnabé, buried only the night before among the twenty-three martyrs.

Barnabé, more vicious through his vanity than from real wickedness. Elise thought often of him, the latest victim of the Vergoyer. Fortunately he had left no family, and his death affected no one in the village. Elise was, perhaps, the only one who had not forgotten him.

It took Poidevin a long time to make up his mind—five rounds of grog, and an hour's talk, and nothing definite yet.

"Have another drink, to wind up with, Poidevin. Lise will stand treat."

"Thanks, Silvere," said Elise. "You know that I am no hand at drinking."

"Well then, for a joke, if the girl will drink I will engage her."

"Your word is good, Poidevin. Lise will drink willingly."

She drank in all frankness, and when she had given an account of herself he kept his word. They signed engagements over three fresh cups of liquor, on the greasy table in the smoky room. As she

wrote her name at the bottom of the paper, she felt the pen run lightly. She was sure of the future, for everything in the past had gone as she wished.

As she thought of her approaching departure, which should bring her nearer Firmin, she let her eyes wander through the open door toward the boats anchored in the harbor.

She was so surprised on seeing before her the little hunchback, that she sat perfectly still. He stopped short in the doorway. His bony face was paler and longer, and more weak and sad than she had ever seen it. He did not enter, but made a sign to Elise to come to him. He felt that he could tell more easily out of doors what he had to say.

He had been discharged from the Bureau, as shortly as if he had been unfaithful. Immediately on his return his chief had summoned him, had recalled the grotesque spectacle he had made in full view of all on the quay of Saint-Valery, and emphasizing the discredit which this cast on the Bureau, had concluded in such a fashion that the clerk had remembered the words exactly.

"I am sorry on account of your family, sir, but I am obliged to discharge you. I should be weak if I were to overlook your offence. Go."

As he repeated the words which struck her ear so dolorously, the little hunchback raised his dimmed and mournful eyes to Elise. Under his glance, the unspeakably sad glance of a sick man, she started, and her breast swelled with pity.

"Poor M. Emile. What have you done?"

What had he done? He had made his way

through the streets of Saint-Valery to the outskirts where he lived. He had tried not to show his trouble, lest he should weep like a girl before all these people who would be only too happy at his disgrace.

Then his family had snubbed him, and had made him go the next day and offer apologies, which the commissaire had refused.

Elise made up her mind promptly. She would go at once and beg his forgiveness from the commissaire. After her recent success, she did not doubt that a little courage and plenty of resolution were all that was needed to make these mighty officials do what was right.

She took with her Silvere and Barbet, crossed the bay, and knocked resolutely at the door of the bureau. The little hunchback, who had followed her, step by step, pitifully, like a whipped dog, stopped a little way off and hid himself beyond a pile of joists. As she was about to go in Elise looked for him, and, finding him after a little search, scolded him gently.

"You must come, M. Emile. You will never gain anything without courage. It is poor people's money. You must come."

He went in, pushed by Elise rather than from any will of his own. Hardly had he crossed the sill than he dropped his head and disappeared behind her skirts. He had seen, behind the heap of boxes at his table, a shaggy head overtopping a large body. His place was filled. It was useless to do anything.

"We will go in since we are here, all the same," said Elise. "It will cost nothing to try."

But she could not keep the little hunchback, who glided to the door so quickly that she hardly had time to put out her two arms to stop him. He slipped through her hands and took to his heels, but, quick as he was, she was up with him in no time.

"Come, M. Emile. I give you a chance. You must show that you are worthy of it."

On seeing all four enter, the commissaire assumed his dignity and his chair. He foresaw a vigorous attack, and took the most available position to withstand it. He glanced at Barbet and the little hunchback contemptuously, paid no attention to Silvere, and finished his scrutiny by addressing to Elise a smile of interrogation.

She replied by an exact statement of facts. M. Emile was not able to earn a living in any other way, and his old parents needed his help; places were scarce at Saint-Valery—he wished to come back, he acknowledged his fault.

"Is it not so, M. Emile? You will be more courteous to the sailors. He will give you back your place, if you will promise to behave properly."

Without raising his eyes, which were fixed on the ground, the little hunchback stammered out unintelligible excuses.

"It is useless," said the commissaire. "I have arranged to fill your place."

Elise interposed quickly:

"Yes, we have seen the big, shaggy fellow. Men of that size are not made for such light work as

writing. They should take other places than those fit for feeble folk."

The commissaire laughed. He began to understand Elise. He forgot that he had thought her crazed. He found her instead clear-headed and decided, and actuated by a feeling of generous fairness. He felt the power of her strength, strong from its very simplicity, and for fear of proving weak before it, he tried to break off the interview abruptly.

"Do not urge me. I cannot send away a good clerk to take back a bad one."

"That is not the point at issue at all, for the little man promises to mend his ways. We do not wish to take away his bread from the big fellow either. We will find a place for him more in keeping with his size."

"It is not possible. Leave me."

"No, we will not go until you promise. Silvere wishes it as much as I, and Barbet, too."

Hearing his name pronounced, the dog wagged his tail, and gave little barks of assent.

"At least turn the dog out. It is the first time that any one has taken the liberty of bringing a dog into my office."

"Barbet is much better than most people. Come, Barbet, make a beautiful bow to the commissaire."

Barbet made his reverence as seriously as a dancing-master, and acquitted himself of his task with a complaisance so amusing that the chief broke out laughing.

"Your beast is too absurd. Come, don't make me lose any more time with him."

"He knows also sailors' songs. Barbet, go aloft, and sing the sailor-boy's farewell."

The dog, whom Elise had placed by a chair, put his feet about its legs and pretended to hoist himself up, as if it were a rope and he a monkey. Then sitting erect on the seat, he uttered a series of modulated barks, long or short, cheerful or melancholy, always in rhythm. He nodded his head, opened and closed his eyes, emphasized parts with good effect, and mimicked the play of words with most laughable contortions.

The chief laughed. The strangeness of this interview put him off his guard. Disconcerted by the *naïveté* of these four intruders, who, without any sense of impropriety, had taken possession of his office, he offered only a weak resistance.

"Your beast is absurd. Make an end of this ridiculous exhibition."

"Barbet knows how to handle a boat. Attention, Barbet."

"Thanks, but do not give him so much trouble for nothing. I do not care for any more."

"Oh, he loves to be admired. Come, Barbet, to the helm—starboard to the wind."

Like a performer before some high personage, Barbet showed all his accomplishments, especially the drill, which he executed promptly in the most approved fashion, with a ruler for a musket; a ruler which Elise had boldly borrowed from the commissaire's table. He was not happy when he had to show a visit of inspection, for he had not his chevrons and lace, and this infraction of rules did not



HE UTTERED A SERIES OF MODULATED BARKS, LONG OR SHORT.

seem proper to him. But he made it up to them by other tricks no less surprising, recognizing boats and taking children to school, and finally, on a sign from Elise, by dragging himself to the commissaire's feet as if asking the offender's pardon.

"We will see. It is impossible in my office, I have filled his place; but I will find him another situation."

"No, we want M. Emile to be with you. Your big, shaggy man can be a sailor. That is better than writing. Come, ask again, Barbet."

"Go. Leave me. I will give him the place. This fashion of begging is intolerable."

"Then you will keep him in your office! I promised him he should be there, and I do not want you to make me tell a falsehood."

"Yes, yes. Go away with your dog."

"But we must thank you first. Salute, Barbet. And you, too, M. Emile, you must kiss his hand."

And pushing the dog and the hunchback toward the commissaire, Elise urged them to profuse thanks. And behind them, she said in her turn:

"I thank you for M. Emile. I was the cause of his losing his place, and it was right that I should secure his reinstatement. Silvere, offer your hand."

"Enough! Enough! Leave me. If you do not all go at once, I shall have to take back my word. But it is all right. Have you finished at last? Adieu."

All four went out, Barbet dignified, the hunchback joyful, Elise happy, and Silvere astounded at her energy.

"You work harder than a man."

"Was it I who did it? No, it was Barbet, who gained the commissaire's ear by his pleasant ways."

It was not Barbet. What had gained the commissaire's ear was the voice of pity; that same voice which, in the first place, had made him engage a man who was sickly, and, as Elise had said, unable to earn a living in any other way. Hunchbacks are doomed from birth to be either shopmen or clerks.

By his abrupt dismissal, his chief had meant simply to teach his impertinent clerk a lesson. He foresaw the usual attempts at reinstatement, and knew that the solicitations of the culprit himself, and his relatives and friends, would give an excuse to reinstate him. The big fellow, whom he had installed in the office experimentally, was for no other purpose than to make M. Emile think his dismissal final.

The commissaire had proposed to make his punishment longer, that it might produce a more lasting effect. He had meant it to extend over some weeks, if not months. He had yielded to the entreaties of Elise, in the belief that it would be a fresh humiliation for M. Emile to owe his pardon to simple sailors.

Besides, Elise and her dog, by their bold frankness, had touched him, and, when he shut the door behind his four visitors, he was no less happy than he supposed they were.

Hardly were they outside when the hunchback went to Elise. Great tears of joy ran down his

face, and stopped hesitatingly on his knotted cheek-bones.

"I have only one more favor to ask of you, mademoiselle. Let me embrace you."

"It was not I. It was Barbet," she cried, stepping back.

"No, it was you whom the chief wished to please because you are so lovely. It would please me so much to thank you."

"You must embrace Barbet, too."

Then, moved by compassion, she leaned forward and presented him graciously her two cheeks. The little hunchback raised himself on tiptoe and pressed his pale lips, burning with fever, to them. Then, seizing the dog in his turn, he smothered him with caresses.

On the Place of Saint-Valery the scattered sailors, who saw him weeping and embracing in this singular fashion, burst into hearty guffaws. It was the only revenge they had.

CHAPTER XXIV.

IT was the third Sunday in August when Elise, confident in a happy future and certain that this time she would have good luck, embarked on the *Jeune-Adolphine*. She had said farewell to Mother Pilote, whom she left quite disconsolate, and who had wished to soften her solitude by keeping Barbet. But how could Barbet live away from Elise? He, too, was going to sea.

It was the beginning of the autumn fishing. They sought the herring now, not to the north of Scotland, but in the North Sea near the extreme limits of England. Doubtless the corvette which had rescued Firmin would be stationed at Edinburgh or Berwick. Elise counted on finding some way to meet him. In the North Sea the fishing-grounds are more contracted than in the ocean, the boats are nearer together and communicate more easily. It would be very strange if they did not meet either the corvette herself, or at least one of the coasters who run between the fishers and the nearest English port.

Thanks to Silvere, Elise owned a share in the nets. He had not been willing that she should be at a disadvantage on account of her poverty, and had persuaded her to accept a new outfit.

And the third day after the new moon, these nets dropped into the water for the first time.

The *Jeune-Adolphine* had reached the fishing-grounds at noon only, but the breeze and the weather were so favorable that they spread the nets without delay.

Twilight, with its serene harmony, fell on the sea. When all the nets had been set and the boat, towed by them, drifted idly in the current, Elise, fascinated by the beauty of the night, could not make up her mind to sleep.

Stretched on the gunwale beside Silvere, she watched the golden lights on the changing sea, which seemed in harmony with her thoughts.

"Silvere, I think that we love each other more tenderly when we are together in such tranquil scenes. Where away is England?"

For a long time she was silent, looking in the direction where Silvere had pointed.

"There is where Firmin is. He was too ambitious to be a simple coast sailor like us. Do not be hurt that I think of him. I am so happy to know that you love me."

He said nothing, this big Silvere, so much afraid was he of startling the tender murmur which just reached his ears. He overtopped Elise by a full head, and, bent down toward her, he watched her with delight, so full of life and so beautiful did she seem under this soft light.

"Be sure, Elise, that I am not jealous of Firmin. We will both love him, as we both love Mother Pilote. You are not envious of her because I love

her. I love you both, but not with the same warmth. It must be right, because it is human nature."

During two hours of drifting they talked together, hearing only their own voice and heedless of the songs that came through the half-open hatch.

Big Poidevin was drunk. Two hours of his cabin was equivalent with him to a dozen drinks, just enough to fill him full. But though his brain might be drowsy his eye was wide open, and when the moment came to take up the nets he was the first on deck, summoning all the men to work.

"Hollo! Beetle heads! Strike up work.

Big Poidevin, an old quartermaster, carried his liquor as no other veteran aboard.

When he was full he was as steady as if he was anchored with four cables. He was the most solid drinker on the coast. It was his pride, after a dozen drinks, to keep his balance as steady as if he had dined on the empty wind.

As to the rest, he was a good liver and a pleasant companion. He had no family, and took his pleasures only in his bottle and glass. He had a horror of the shore, where, as he said, he did not love to lie like a boat aground.

"Hollo! lads! When the capstan snores, the sailor wakes."

The capstan did not snore yet, but it was evident that he meant to set it at work.

"Hollo! lads! Wind from the north-east with the moon. We will take up fish by the binful. Hollo! All on deck,"

At the captain's call, Elise came with Silvere. They were not of opinion that it was wise to take up the nets yet. As they had talked, they had now and then cast an eye on the line of floats, and had noticed that they had not settled, as was the case under a catch of fish. The nets were, without doubt, empty.

Their advice was sound. After a long discussion Poidevin agreed to follow it, and disappeared down the fore-castle ladder. He was going back for another hour to his mug and flask.

"Let us go and sleep like the others, Lise. You will be ill if you neglect your sleep."

"No, not to-night, Silvere. It is too delicious. It goes to one's very heart. I love to watch the sea, now that it has given back my father."

"Lise, dreams are not food. A good sailor, to keep strong, must eat and sleep. Fishing is hard enough when one gets one's rest."

"Silvere, look there. The sea seems to be on fire. Is it not flashing? What say you?"

Yes, it was the flash of the herring which, like a trail of phosphorus, drew near them rapidly. The wave seemed on fire, so filled was it with iridescent lights; sapphire blue, emerald green, red gold, shading off into silvery gleams. It was as if a pageant beneath the water was advancing, with a bewilderment of gleaming metal and precious gems. It was impossible to look at it. The moon, ordinarily so white, seemed, in comparison, of a dirty gray. It looked so dejected that Elise threw it a glance of pity.

"Is it possible that this light in the sea can snuff out the moon, as she snuffs out the stars? Silvere, what makes the herring gleam so? They burn the eyes."

She buried her face in his shoulder. He, laughing, held her dear head with his great hand, which he tried to make soft for the task.

"Look, Lise. They are going to rush into our net. Look, it will be like fireworks."

As rapidly as a lake of fire which has burst its bounds, the school of herring advanced, grazing the surface of the water, every back and fin scintillating with light, and lighting up the night with their blinding gleams.

"Quick, Lise, they are here."

There was a splash of fire like burning coals; an electric snapping through the whole mass, as if a stream, arrested by a wall, had dashed back on itself in foaming fury. All the nets came to the surface along their length to the very end, in a gleaming tremor. And the school of herring, dispersing abruptly, disappeared behind the boat, like the last rays of an expiring fire.

After the light had passed, and their eyes, accustomed again to the twilight, could distinguish objects, they saw that the nets were dragged down under the weight of their strangling, struggling victims.

"Captain, it is time to haul in. The floats are sunk."

Big Poidevin had had an hour too much. Contrary to his habit, he scuffled along and staggered.

When he tried to mount to the deck, he missed the rounds of the ladder and fell heavily on the plank-ing.

"This is no time to lose control, captain; the fish can be taken by armfuls."

The captain rose to his feet, furious at losing his reputation as a hard-headed drinker. He bent all his energies to gaining the deck without further weakness, and, the ladder mounted, he called all the men with a triumphant shout.

With pantings and groanings from the capstan, and shouts from the sailors, the work began. As soon as taken aboard the nets were shaken over the hatches, into which the fish fell in a phosphorescent rain. Salt was thrown in with them, and when the hatches were filled to the very top all hands were ready for a chowder. They had caught thousands.

It was the next day at noon only that the work was finished. In a single night more than half the boat's bins were full, half of their catch was taken. Six hundred measures. It was wonderful.

They spread their nets again the next night and the nights after that. While the fishing is good no one minds hard work and each day brings variety.

They caught after that, according to the weather, from two hundred measures at most, down to fifty and even twenty-five.

The chance to meet a school at the right moment does not come twice.

CHAPTER XXV.

AT daybreak of the twenty-first day the boat was still fishing. Like the herring, she had moved southward insensibly, but without leaving the neighborhood of Scotland. At every hour of the day Elise searched the horizon for the corvette and Firmin, but saw no trace of them.

Always bad luck. In twenty days they had not only not seen the corvette, but not even a coaster from some English port. They were so near one another, they wished for one another so much, and yet could not meet.

Well, she would force fortune to yield yet; she would discover the corvette if she put out her eyes in trying to pierce the horizon. She passed all her spare moments standing on the gunwale peering into space, but it gave no answer to her heart's desire. At first she had tried to watch at night, too, but she simply used herself up uselessly, for she could not distinguish between the lanterns, and thought she recognized the corvette by the cut of her sails, only to find out, after a long examination, that in the half-light she had mistaken a small boat for a large vessel.

Then she had given up night watching as useless, but every morning, before the first rays of dawn had pierced the shadows, she was on the deck

and there she stayed until the last glimmer of light.

She began to be desperate, because the boat was slowly filling its bunks, and the end of the cruise was near at hand.

She was on duty that morning at the helm, and was tacking about waiting until it was time to cast the nets. Silvere was below asleep, but Barbet watched beside his mistress. Unhappy Barbet. He did not like it on board at all, for it was his first voyage. He had passed through a wretched novitiate. Sick at heart, he lay stretched among the piles of nets, groaning at each movement of the boat, and hardly having strength to open his eyes at Elise's voice.

For five days he had counted his shirts, as the sailors mockingly say. Then he had become used to it all, and after that Barbet feared the motion no more than any old hand. At that moment he raised his nose and ears and yelped, to advise Elise that she was nearing something unusual.

She thought at first that he saw the corvette and was announcing Firmin, but though she looked all about, she could see nothing like the government boat.

Until then they had come across trading steamers only, and especially coal ships, heavy in their build, and a solid mass of black. They are clumsy to handle, have a small crew, and cannot easily change their course. They go right on without regard to other vessels, and small boats must look sharp and keep out of their way. They do not mind a col-

lision in the least, for they cannot be capsized. They are afraid of one another only.

They can be seen in these seas in troops. Elise kept a sharp lookout for them while she was at the helm. She had told Barbet to announce them, but it was not one of these which he was signalling now.

"What is it then, Barbet. Is it those breakers that we can just make out before us? They look like a floating island."

The dog yelped louder.

"Don't be impatient. We will run down to them. As well go there as elsewhere. Misery! They look like nets. You say, yes, Barbet? I think that a boat must have been lost. Tell me, is it one of ours? You are not telling the truth! No! do not deceive me. It is not the *Bon-Pêcheur*—I should be too wretched if any harm came to Florimond. Quick, Barbet, go and bring Silvere!"

The dog made one bound to the forecastle, and returned at once, dragging by his trouser's leg big Silvere, who was still half asleep.

"Tell the captain to order a boat, to go and see what is floating there."

When the captain was asleep he did not like to be waked. The boat was in the water towing behind.

On his own responsibility Silvere dropped into it with two men. They quickly reached the nets, which were so snarled together that they seemed like a heap of rocks.

Nets and floats drifted at the pleasure of the current like a raft. The men climbed on them as

securely as on a projecting reef. They walked across them, digging and prodding with their boat hooks.

"Not a man under them," cried Silvere to Elise.

He lifted one of the floats and read the marks painted around its middle.

S. V. S. S. 1234.

Is it Florimond's number? Yes. Barbet was right. Twelve hundred and thirty-four was the number of the *Bon-Pêcheur*. The four letters indicated Saint-Valery-sur-Somme. There was no question about it.

"Look further, Silvere. I am surprised, if his sloop were uninjured, that my cousin should have abandoned his nets. He would sooner have towed them into some English port."

Fresh examination brought no other results. The herring, fast here and there in the meshes and quite fresh, showed that the accident had been recent.

The three men searched a long time for the end of the hawser to find out whether it was cut or torn. If it were cut it was the work of thieves; if it were torn it would show that there had been a collision. But it was hidden away in the tangle of cordage and rope, and they could not find it.

"Count the floats, Silvere. I should say at a glance that they were all there."

Parbleu! There are a hundred at least here—as many over there—thirty more—there are so many they cannot count them.

The whole outfit was there, adrift.

"It is very perplexing, Silvere. I am of opinion that the *Bon-Pêcheur* is a bad risk."

While the three men were returning Elise consulted Barbet.

"Barbet, can you tell me where Cousin Florimond is?"

The dog, who was seated quietly on his hind quarters, rose on his four feet. He placed himself face to the wind, which came from the north-east, and for a long time tried to scent something. But he could not. He scowled, sniffed contemptuously, and appeared dissatisfied with the weather and himself. He turned slowly a quarter or third of a circle, trimming himself in the wind.

In the west he could perceive nothing. In the north-west he thought he had a trace, his hair bristled up as he barked loudly; then he stopped discouraged, and sat down again, shaking his big head as if to say: "It is useless to try. In these half-breezes of summer the air lies still, and the scent does not travel at all."

"Come, Barbet, I never knew you to weary over your work. You have not smelled in every direction."

The dog walked about idly.

"Barbet, I beg you. It is wicked not to do your best to help others. I beg you."

He started again at the north-west, and scented afresh without perceiving anything, and, simply to please his mistress, turned slowly around like the needle of a compass on its dial. No trace was to be found in the west or south, and he sat down again.

"Barbet, you are bad. You put no heart in your work. If you cannot act honorably I will not have you any longer for my shipmate."

Elise and Barbet were shipmates, that is, they slept together. Sailors sleep two in a bunk, and the number of bunks being limited she had great difficulty in arranging that Barbet should share hers. For him, it was the pleasantest moment of the cruise. When the time came for sleep he let Elise lie at the back, while he stretched himself, his head on his paws, facing outward.

As long as there was any noise in the place he lay thus, sleeping that half-sleep of dogs who know how to watch with their eyes shut. But after each relief, when those who had come down last were sleeping in their turn, and he heard their heavy snores, then, easy in his mind, he slipped up to Elise, laid his head on her and gave himself up to pleasant dreams.

The rolling of the boat rocked him softly, and Barbet abandoned himself to the joy of feeling under his head the rise and fall of her warm breast.

For nothing in the world would he have risked so delightful a place. At Elise's threat he sprang up, ready for anything rather than lose his shipmate. He began turning about again.

West-south-west—nothing. South-west—south-south-west—nothing. South-south a quarter east.

"Have you gone crazy, Barbet? You are upsetting me."

The dog pulled Elise by the leg. Seeing that she did not understand he threw himself on the tiller, as if to push it in the direction he wished.

When she was steering as he wished, he ran forward to the jib, and by leaps and snaps forced the sailor on duty there to shift the sheet.

The boat tacked and ran south a quarter south-east.

Then, proud as a commander on his deck, Barbet with a leap settled himself on a cask not far from Elise, and from there watched at the same time the helm, the sails, and the horizon, to see that the boat should not make leeway from the strength of a current.

Elise had a fresh cause for anxiety. She had been sent to the helm, and was responsible for carrying out the orders given her.

She had no right to deviate from them without fresh directions from the captain. She called Silvere:

"Wake up Poidevin. We have no right to change our course unless he directs it."

Silvere hesitated. He knew what he would get by disturbing Poidevin's sleep; insults and a refusal, nothing more.

"Very well, then I will awake him myself. Perhaps he will be less disagreeable to a woman."

And confiding the boat to Silvere, Elise started down the ladder. Barbet tried to follow her.

"No, stay behind, Barbet. You know that the skipper does not like you since the day when you upset his grog. One should not be clumsy if they want to make friends."

CHAPTER XXVI.

ELISE was all in a tremble, and her heart beat fast as she descended the ladder of the hatch and heard the heavy breathing of the captain, who lay there snoring. But her uneasiness at knowing that the *Bon-Pêcheur* was in distress, and the fear of bringing help too late, decided her.

"Captain—it is I—I am sorry, but it is important."

"Heu—Heu"—Big Poidevin turned over to sleep on the other side.

"Captain, listen, it is important."

Elise had no reply. She put out her hand and struck him lightly on his fat shoulder.

"Beetle head! Don't touch me, or beware."

And the captain buried his head in the fold of his arm with a growl that did not admit of further urging.

Elise went back to the deck, called one of the sailors to the helm, and taking Silvere by the arm led him to the forecabin.

"I shall be bolder with you. I will hold your hand so as to add your strength to mine. Come Barbet, one cannot have too many friends to encourage one."

All three climbed down, Elise helped by her lover, and happy this time, for she knew that she had the

support of one man in facing another. She knew that Silvere was not a coward, for she had had good proof. She felt her strength increased by his strength, her courage by his courage.

"Captain, you must wake up."

Poidevin snorted like a mad whale. He struck with his fist the wall of his bunk, heavily enough to wake all the other sleepers.

"By my sainted mother!"

"South, a quarter south-east, captain."

"Let me sleep."

"It is on account of Cousin Florimond."

"Florimond! He is not worth even a half mug of grog."

"He is in trouble, captain! We must help him!"

"A braggart! Let him get himself out of trouble, he who is so superior to others."

"All the same, captain, you must get up and——"

"No! Death of my soul, no!"

And for the third time Poidevin went to sleep.

"Then I am going to take the helm. You will hold me blameless?"

"By my sainted mother!"

That was Poidevin's oath, his unusual exclamation, when he wished to put an end to a discussion and was thoroughly angry.

"Very well, captain, by your mother and by all that is dear to you, I tell you that you must go to the help of these men in danger and misery. If any are lost through your fault you will suffer tortures of mind. You will see them at night in bodily presence, with eyes which reproach you and fingers which point at

you. You will see them pale from lack of sleep, and you will have no more sleep yourself. It is not right to stupefy one's self with drink and leave others to die. They will pursue you, Poidevin. You may drink harder than ever, but you will see them as plainly as if you were sober. I saw my father and I wanted to die. I tell you that you must get up."

Poidevin sat up stupidly. With his little gray eyes, all sunk in their sockets, he looked at Elise, then at Silvere, then at the other sailors who had been drawn by the noise of the dispute.

"Come, follow up their tracks, captain. Lise is right. Sailors ought to stand by one another."

Growling and shaking off painfully his stupor, the captain struggled to his feet, then climbed out and went to the helm. He noted their course and approved it, and the boat sailed on south a quarter south-east.

Then Elise, exhausted by her efforts and overcome by her feelings, fell into Silvere's arms.

"Lise, Lise, my beloved, you are more observant than any man and handier than any woman."

And he drew her close to his heart and lips in an irresistible outburst of admiration.

For an hour now they had run in the direction pointed out by Barbet, and had seen nothing. Poidevin had become sober through impatience. They would lose their clue to the herring; they would lose a day's fishing, and all for the pleasure of following a dog's suggestions. He would allow ten minutes, but not another minute more. If they

waited until night in order to find themselves in the bed of the fish they risked going to bed themselves without any.

The more the time ran on without any results the more anxiously did Elise scan the sea.

"Barbet, you have not deceived me?"

The dog did not answer. He was mortified that they should have doubted him. For an hour Elise had been troubling him to repeat every little while the same signal, and he was annoyed in his turn. Silent and resolute, his eye fixed on the point whence came the scent of the shipwrecked men, he waited to see them before speaking.

The ten minutes passed. Poidevin had no watch, but he could tell the time by the sun without ever being out a second. It was a good enough watch for him; it wound itself and did not have to be carried in the pocket.

Noting its position above the horizon the moment he saw the time was up, he shouted:

"Get ready to come about. Loose the jib-sheet!"

"No, Poidevin, just ten minutes more and I will not ask for another one. I promise you, Poidevin."

"Ready to come about!"

"They cannot be far, captain, from the drift of their nets. Barbet, do you see nothing? Speak, my old Barbet."

The dog remained silent, and the captain undecided.

"Ten minutes. Is it too much to give for peace of mind? You will be glad of it, Poidevin."

Ten minutes short as ten seconds.

They sailed fast, but found nothing.

Nothing on the horizon. A boat is large enough to be seen far off. One can distinguish it easily. But there were only the colliers, with their heavy rigging and their black sails. Poidevin had his eye on the sun. The second ten minutes passed.

"Ready to come about! Loose the jib-sheet."

"Captain, if you knew how I suffered on my father's account, you would risk five minutes more. Five minutes—will you condemn yourself for so little time?"

"You trouble me, Lise. We fairly creep along now under our load of fish. Will it take us as long to go back as it has to come? If we once lose the fish, who knows when we shall find them again."

"We will all take a hand in working her."

"You talk nonsense. Can you push the boat?"

"Captain, do not punish yourself. You do not know the torment it brings. Do you see nothing, my old Barbet? If you see ever so little, tell Poidevin."

Barbet kept perfectly silent.

"Ready to come about! Loose the jib-sheet."

And without further hesitation the boat headed back on the way she had come. In despair, as she thought of her cousin Florimond, so fine and so strong, whom the envious sea would soon claim, Elise sank down on the deck.

"Luff her. Hug the wind."

"Captain, I beg you——"

"Give her nearly a full."

"Captain, Barbet speaks—come about!—Barbet

has spoken!—Come about, quickly!—Yes! over there!—No!—Barbet is fooling us!—That is not a boat!—It is more like a beacon!—The glass——”

Elise was at the hatch before she had finished speaking. She slipped from the ladder in her haste to go down, but, picking herself up seized the glass, and, climbing quickly back, adjusted it.

“Come about, captain; there are three men there. They seem to be on a buoy.”

She ran to Poidevin, and placed it before his eyes. She trembled so that he could see nothing.

“Let me have it alone. You jiggle it so under my nose that you upset all my ideas.”

He squared it, correcting the range carefully, and looked for a third time. Elise trembled with nervous anxiety. Finally Poidevin made them out. He threw himself on the helm, and, with a voice like a roll of thunder:

“Hoist all sail. Do not lose a breath of wind. Head south, a quarter south-east.”

The boat again turned in the direction of the castaways. The men who were not working her struggled for the glass. They could nearly make out the wreckage with the naked eye, but the glass showed more than three men. There were six, astride of a mast, a buoy, or a beacon; they could not tell what it was.

“Get the small boat ready. Take boat-hooks and ropes.”

The boat could not sail fast enough to please the captain. Big Poidevin was warm-hearted when he was not in liquor. He hated to cry, for it gave him

a cold; but his eyes filled with tears, so greatly was he moved at these men's sufferings.

"Death of my soul, Elise! they will owe you a good turn, those fellows there, if they ever realize what you have done for them."

"Let us make haste, captain. The sailors can make out only five men through the glass. There were certainly six. One must have fallen."

There were not even five, but only four, when the sloop reached them. All had seen the *Jeune-Adolphe* coming, but their strength had not held out.

Elise slipped hurriedly into the small boat, taking with her Silvere and two sailors. She was to steer, Silvere held himself free for the work of rescue, and the two sailors were to row.

They drew near the wretched men, who were clinging to a boat's mast, as they could tell by the rigging and by the tin pennant, which was still showing the direction of the wind, as if in irony.

The *Bon-Pêcheur's* hull had been crushed, and, before she disappeared forever, she lay floating out of sight; as if in the last effort of a faithful servant to offer in her top-mast a place of refuge for the survivors of her crew.

Florimond was there. They learned later on the details of the disaster. He had been run down the night before, while fishing. A collier, rather than swerve a trifle from her course, had gone over the *Bon-Pêcheur*, which, hampered in her movements by the floating nets, had not been able to avoid her. Twelve men, including the boy, had taken refuge in

the small boat, which was capable, at most, of holding half that number. What had become of them?

For fifteen hours the other six had clung to the main-mast.

They had seen craft of all kinds. In those seas they were nearly as common as vehicles on a road on shore; but no one had seen them, or had wanted to see them. They were about to let go, in exhaustion and despair, when the *Jeune-Adolphine* had appeared. Two of them, alas! had not been able to hold out for the few minutes until help came.

"Keep up your courage, Cousin Florimond. Pull hard, men. Aim well, Silvere."

It was not easy to come alongside the men. The rigging around the mast kept the boat off, and made it necessary for them to slide down into the water and be fished out afterward with the gaff. They were so weak, so nearly at their last gasp, and so spent that they could do nothing to help themselves. Unconsciously, as it were, they clung fast, seeming to have lost all power of thought and action. The captain was highest on the mast, and the three men were below him.

"Aim straight, Silvere. Slide down, Old Quarrelsome."

Old Quarrelsome was a well-known sailor of the *Bon-Pêcheur*, and a great hand to use his fists or his knife. Elise knew him, for she had made her first cruise with him, and had often seen him among her enemies. How many times he had stirred up Florimond against her. It was he who held the jigger-sheet when Silvere and Barnabé had quarrelled, and

who had urged them on by his cries. Elise forgot it all, and Silvere, too, had no desire to recall it.

"Hurry, Old Quarrelsome, the others are waiting."

The man did not dare to move. His mind was weakened, as well as his body. He looked at them stupidly, as if he did not understand. A kick on the head, which Florimond brutally dealt him, made him loose his hold. He plunged and disappeared, but the gaff followed and he came to the surface with it fast to him, like a sturgeon at the end of a harpoon, and was quickly hauled aboard.

It was the second man's turn. He was an orphan and nearly an idiot, whom the sailors called Stutterer. It was, doubtless, partly through pity, for words failed him more from stupidity than from any trouble with his tongue. Elise knew him, too, as she knew all the men on the *Bon-Pêcheur*. Ill-tempered by reason of his infirmity, he had treated her roughly at times. She forgave him.

"Slide down, Stutterer."

He clung stupidly to the mast, uttering cries like a monkey in distress. A kick, which resounded on his hard skull, knocked him senseless into the water, where he was seized by the hook of the gaff and was soon with his fellow in the boat.

"Hurrah! Silvere!" shouted Poidevin and all his men, as from the deck of the *Jeune-Adolphine* they watched this strange fishing. "Hurrah!"

They had to go to the other side of the mast to get the third man. He could not help himself any more than the others. He clung more firmly even

than they, and did not drop until he had received four kicks. He was unconscious when he was hauled in at the end of Silvere's unerring gaff.

Then they rowed to the *Jeune-Adolphine* to carry the three men whom they had rescued, for the boat was already overloaded.

"We will come back for you, Florimond. Hold fast."

"Don't be uneasy, Lise. I can hang on as long as necessary. I am not an old woman."

Florimond was always a man of surprises. He was stronger than any one. After hanging at arm's length for fifteen hours, he could have hung on another day and night. When he saw the boat returning he slid down the mast to the water, refused the aid of the gaff which was held him, and struck out, like a virtuoso in his bath, to swim to them.

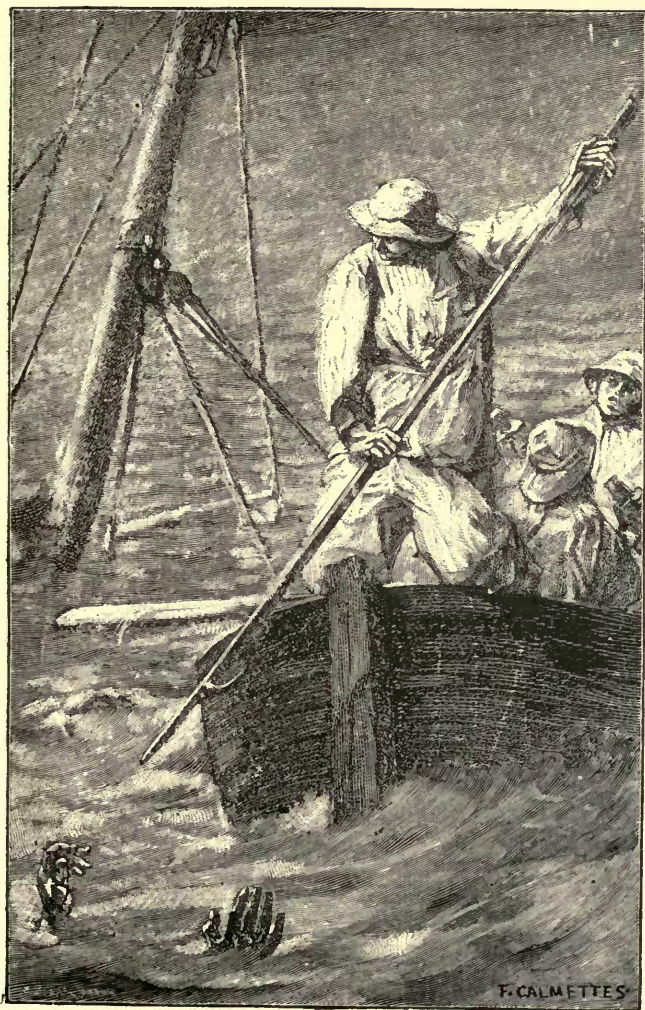
He was fine, was Florimond. His muscular arms cleft the water, above which towered his proud, bronzed face. Suddenly he started, and stopped as if caught fast.

"Help, Silvere!"

The gaff was within reach of his hand, but he could not seize it. His rigid fingers stood out stiffly for some instants above the water, and then disappeared.

"Do not let him die, Silvere. To the rescue, my old Barbet."

The dog leaped overboard and reappeared presently, splashing like a cat, with a piece of a blouse in his mouth. The gaff came to his aid and dragged up a bundle of flesh and clothes, which seemed life-



HIS RIGID FINGERS STOOD OUT STIFFLY FOR SOME INSTANTS
ABOVE THE WATER.

less. But the arms suddenly clutched the offered help. "Haul him in, Silvere. He is saved!"

"Misery! Help, Poidevin!"

Dragged down by Florimond's weight and thrown off his balance, Silvere went headlong into the sea.

"Help, Poidevin!"

But he was too far away to help. With a turn of her arm, Elise made fast a rope around her waist.

"Hold firmly, men, and haul hard after I have dived."

She threw herself headlong. The sailors hauled in the rope. What a strange mass came with her! In the last agonies of a drowning man Florimond had seized Silvere in a desperate clutch. They struggled hand to hand, one clutching, the other pushing him off. In the fierceness of the struggle they escaped from Elise's grasp, and disappeared a second time. She dived again. Slowly she came back to the surface, drawn by the rope, and dragging her burden with both hands.

"My strength is all gone. Florimond drags us down."

Barbet heard her cry. He had recovered his breath, and was swimming about, waiting until he could be of use. He dashed forward, and, seizing Florimond by the throat, strangled him until he loosed his hold.

Elise helped first Silvere, then Florimond, who, in his mighty arms, convulsively clutched Barbet, whom he half crushed.

Elise dived again.

What could she be searching for, now that they

were all safe—Silvere, Barbet, and Florimond? Did she hope to recover the two men of the *Bon-Pêcheur* who had fallen, overcome by weakness, the moment before the arrival of the *Jeune-Adolphine*? Alas, the waves had swept them away as they pleased!

“Get aboard, Lise. Your Barbet is badly hurt.”

“What is it? Misery! Hurry, men, and pull me in.”

Half pulled, half climbing, Elise scrambled into the boat. She found Barbet with rattling breath, his tongue hanging out, foam on his lips, and only the whites of his eyes visible.

“Speak to me, my old Barbet. Tell me that you are not hurt. It would be too hard to lose your life in saving those of others, old Barbet.”

CHAPTER XXVII.

BARBET was cared for like a child. Stretched on a soft bed of nets and bagging, he had the bunk all to himself. Elise had given it up to him. Sick people must have comforts. She herself slept, sitting on a box near his bed, and, like a true shipmate, took the best care of him.

She made endless dressings and cooling drinks for him. He would turn his eye, lighted with the wild gleams of fever, toward her, then his head would drop weakly and slowly back.

"Get well quickly, my old Barbet. What will Firmin say to see you in this plight? He will scold me for having let you get hurt."

Barbet did not show any interest at all at the name of Firmin. He was interested only in the things of life that appealed to his heart. Was it likely that he would be moved at the thought of a lad who cared more for ambition than for friendship. He wished to get well, truly, but only to please Elise, whom he had always loved, who loved him in her sorrow as well as in her joy, when he was sick and when he was well alike.

He had nearly died, and all through a misunderstanding. In throwing himself on Florimond, he had wanted simply to free Silvere, and make the task of saving him more easy. His good intentions

had been badly repaid, for he had been nearly throttled in a moment of furious rage by the man whom he was trying to succor.

Florimond himself, strong as always, had not suffered long from the shock. He was one of those who leave illness to others, and keep none for themselves. A night's rest made him forget all his bodily fatigue.

But he did not find it so easy to forget his troubles of mind.

Not that he was much concerned at the loss of his boat. He counted on the insurance companies making that good. Apart from his boat he was rich. An old aunt, who admired his strength and beauty, had made him her heir. Since then he had been in a position where he not only need not sail himself, but might own ships sent out in charge of others. He loved the sea so much that he had not been able to leave her. To-day he was tired of her. He had found out what pleasure she takes in betraying those upon whom she has piled up her favors.

She was the true culprit, and he had had the meanness to persecute another when the fault had been hers. Poor Elise. He had harassed her and had accused her of a betrayal of trust, and now he knew that she was innocent. He had caused her great distress, and, for her revenge, she had saved his life.

Without her he would have been drowned, and, from abyss to abyss in that endless waste of waters, dragged down by the weight of his sins, he would

have tossed about pitilessly with staring eyes, his body eaten by fishes, his soul in torture. She had saved him not only from death, but from the pains of expiation.

Courageous under all circumstances, forgetful of injuries, strong in her sacrifice of self, how had he failed to appreciate her! Her heart was as noble as her face was pure. Was she really to marry Silvere, a man without shoulders or chest, all length and no breadth. If he were rich even, this big gull; but he was not well enough off to be even a captain. His father had made large sums in his trade as pilot, but unfortunately he had not managed well, for they had gone to assist his neighbors, and in kindly acts which had not helped the donor.

Florimond paced the deck of the *Jeune-Adolphine*, full of troubled thoughts. He was tired to death of the forecastle, the close air distressed him. He was at ease only under the lash of the breeze, for his heart was full of disquiet.

Sometimes when he met him on the deck, so overcome with melancholy, Poidevin would throw him a comforting word.

"It is better to drown your trouble, Captain Florimond, than to let it drown you. Come, the jug of grog is waiting. It would not be fair to let it go dry from lack of notice."

But neither rum nor any other spirits could console Florimond. Poidevin had to drink alone, and he did his best at it, looking into his mug for good advice.

He had not completed the cruise; that is to say,

all his bins were not filled, but he could not make up his mind whether he had better head for home or not.

In looking for the castaways they had lost the herring, and had not been able to find them, although they had tried thoroughly. Besides, in spite of the advanced season, the days were warm, and the fish might ferment in the hold. The first week of September had gone, the equinoctial storms were at hand. It was the time of the year when squalls are so common that one meets them at every turn. Decidedly it would be better to save what fish they had and pass a week ashore. Such was the advice which the captain decided to follow after a whole day's session with his mug.

"Well, lads, the cruise is over. Tell the man at the wheel to head for home."

Elise was busy near Barbet, when she heard him shout this out at the top of his voice.

She started as she heard it. And Firmin? Should she not see him again? To leave the Scotch seas was to give up the hope of meeting him. Without stopping to think she ran to Poidevin.

"Take me first to England, captain, I want to see my boy."

Well as he knew Elise's plans, and thoroughly as he had decided not to oppose them, at least unless compliance with them menaced the safety of the boat, Poidevin was stunned at her demand. He raised his arms above his head, and murmured some ill-humored exclamations.

"Death of my soul! You think no more of flaunt-

ing your demands in our faces than in turning a quid in your mouth. I should be a fool to do as you wish. Try to meet your corvette on the way home, or you will have no chance of seeing your Firmin. What do you expect? it is the way of our trade."

"You must take me, captain; I came with the expectation of seeing my boy. I will not go until I have succeeded in my plan."

"By my sainted mother!"

Poidevin turned his back so angrily that Elise saw that it was useless to insist. She passed the night near Barbet, and at dawn went on deck to begin her outlook again.

Through constant watching her eyes had gained an unusual power, so that the most distant and the most fleeting objects were clear to them.

It was hardly four o'clock. The horizon was indistinct by reason of a haze or fog. At intervals she thought she could make out some black dots, but they speedily disappeared. Then more anxiously than ever she searched the great expanse, as if at any moment there might start forth the well-appointed corvette she was looking for.

Elise thought sadly that over yonder, behind the fogs, was a coast that now she had no chance of knowing. There were the shores of Scotland stretching away, green under the majestic reaches of ancient forests. Scotland, rich and beautiful as a land preferred of nature, was already far away; for, for seven hours they had sailed southward and they had passed the northern bounds of England.

Edinburgh and Berwick! Elise had given up hope of ever seeing them.

That night they should reach the neighborhood of the gulf into which the Thames pours its muddy and impure waters. The air is black with smoke, the sky itself is darkened. Its outlines cannot be distinguished from the open sea because its shores are low, but it can easily be known from the number of steamers inward bound. Elise dreaded to reach it, for once there, it would be foolish to hope any longer.

Was not that smoke on the northern horizon? No; it was only a flock of seagulls which had waked with the day.

Misery! Should the big sister have less courage than her little brother? He had discovered a way of escape from the *flambart*, ought she to hesitate? She would buy Poidevin's small boat, paying for it with her nets; she would take Silvere, and they would row ashore, they two, and would find Firmin.

On government ships the discipline is strict and the officers are harsh. With his spirit of insubordination the lad would suffer; he would want his sister. Without doubt he asked for her every night in his prayers, and was consumed with desire to see her.

There was no time to lose. Elise raised herself to go and strike a bargain with the captain. But big Poidevin was still asleep. The night before he had had a great orgy in the forecastle, and he had drunk to his decision to return, emptying his mug twice more than usual.

No, it was not a flight of seagulls which made that long trail in the sky. It was really smoke, but not so thick, heavy, and black as that of the colliers.

What was the use of hoping ! It was probably a steamer, like so many others, sailing from some English port. Poidevin might be angry if he wished ; well, let him be ; when one wishes a thing ought not one dare ask for it ?

But this vessel really began to look like a corvette ; her outlines became distinct. Through the glass, which never left her, Elise made out presently three top-masts and their yards rising gradually above the sea. The breeze was soft that morning, and her smoke, which rose high and straight, was seen first.

The lower masts appeared in their turn, and at last the hull with her guns. It was certainly a corvette under steam and sail. She was now clearly in the field of the glass. She cleft the waves with her graceful lines, and seemed as if following in their wake and in pursuit of them. In a quarter of an hour she would overtake the *Jeune-Adolphine*. It was certainly she ! French colors ! Yes it was she, and Firmin was aboard.

She could hardly keep her feet, she trembled so with delight. Suddenly she recovered herself, and, bursting like a puff of wind into the forecastle, cried with the full force of her lungs :

“ Silvere, the corvette ! We shall see Firmin.”

All the sailors were roused from their dreams ; Poidevin alone snored on. Silvere sprang to his feet ready to share the delight of his betrothed.

"Examine her yourself, Silvere. I am sure my heart has not deceived me."

Then hurriedly Elise went to the bunk where Barbet lay uncomplainingly.

"Our little Firmin is close at hand, my old Barbet. If you would only get well quickly we should be so happy, we three. What makes you scowl so? It is bad not to trust in the love of one's friends. I will go away, you pain me."

Two light barks recalled Elise. The dog turned toward her his mournful head and his sombre eyes.

"I forgive you, my old Barbet. Sick people are always restless and full of suspicion. Our Firmin does not forget you."

And Elise laid her cheek softly against his nose.

"Always a warm nose, Barbet, and always these shivers! You need land air to set you up again. This time we will go home without any regrets."

She petted him, gently smiling, stroking his head where the temples beat with fever, and his neck, whose warmth she loved, but which was now burning hot. She ran to get a fresh draught, and carefully and patiently, spoonful by spoonful, she made the sick dog drink. Then she dried his lips and put all her affection in a good-by kiss.

Opening her box, which lay in front of the bunk, she took out of it her best skirt and her most coquetish hat, and taking off her sou'wester and her oil-skin dress, arrayed herself as if for a high holiday. She threw a last smile at Barbet.

"Do not be uneasy, my old Barbet. I will bring Firmin as soon as he mounts the deck."

And while the dog followed her with a mournful look, as if overcome by some dismal foreboding, she hurried away. She was up the ladder in two bounds, and started as she saw the corvette flying the French flag close to them. She climbed the bulwarks quickly and clung there, looking for Firmin.

She saw him at the very end of the bowsprit, with nothing else to steady himself by but the ropes. There he stood, at least fifty feet away from the deck, in advance of the ship, as if hovering in the air above the sea. He was like one of those bold figures which imagination gives as guides to ships on allegorical voyages.

Elise was so frightened that she had to get down, half dazed, from the bulwarks to the solid surface of the deck.

It was truly her lad, unconscious of danger, as he always was. She did not dare to make a sign or utter a word, for fear he should be startled and lose his balance. She hid herself behind a corner of the sail, and had not yet regained her composure when the corvette came to leeward of the sloop, took in sail so as to fetch her, and began to run alongside in order to hail.

"Jeune-Adolphine. Captain Amable Poidevin. Official orders!"

The captain, hastily forewarned, appeared at that moment, still half dazed with sleep. He announced himself at once as the captain, and the boat stopped while the corvette came alongside.

The interchange of words between the two boats was short. A letter from the maritime prefect had

arrived two days before at the station at Plymouth, ordering them to search in the Scotch seas for the *Jeune-Adolphine*, and to transfer to her the lad rescued from the sea. This letter was the result of steps taken jointly by the under-commissaires of Treport and Saint-Valery. They had joined forces in order to arrange for Elise a surprise, and to give her the pleasure of bringing home her brother.

Orders were called out on the deck of the corvette.

"Boatswain!"

An old sailor with deep wrinkles came forward.

"Bring the boy, Hénin."

On hearing this order, Elise could not restrain herself.

"Firmin, my dear boy, my Firmin, hurry. I cannot wait."

But when the boatswain came to call him, Firmin steadied himself by the rope and did not budge.

Elise was wild with impatience.

"Firmin, you break my heart by your delay. Come quickly. You will see Barbet."

The boy was obstinate. Neither pleasant nor sharp words succeeded in bringing him to the deck. The boatswain ordered them to seize him. Two sailors sat astride the bowsprit, and gradually worked their way almost to the rebel. But how were they to stand erect on this slippery pole hardly large enough for the feet of a bird, and, if once erect, how could they struggle with him without twenty times risking a plunge into the sea?

The boy impassible, with a steady look and perfectly determined, watched them approach.

He had been told of the orders which had come concerning him, and refused to leave the vessel. The true life for him was not that of a hand on one of the dirty little fishing-boats smelling of brine, but that of a sailor on a glittering ship odorous of polished wood.

This new life so full of hope, this future of riches and glory, had opened to him. He did not wish to see his sister yet ; he had sworn not to return until he had won the lace of a quartermaster.

But the corvette could not lie there at the caprice of a lad. After long consultations among the officers, a topman climbed to that point on the mast whence a cable runs to the very end of the bowsprit.

Then, without hesitation, without even considering the danger, he swung himself from the cable, and hand under hand he descended it slowly and evenly, so that Firmin should not suspect his coming.

The sailors who had seen the maneuver made as if to attack Firmin, in order to keep him on guard. He had his eye on them, ready to take the defensive.

Not a sound. On the two boats all the men were watching, their eyes opened, their lips closed, in their excitement.

The topman, keeping steadily on, was approaching without being seen. Two fathoms more, and the boy was taken.

Through the deep silence, like the trail of a rocket, came a long, strident cry :

"Watch the top, my little man——"

A cry which broke in on the stupor of officers and men, and reverberated, with echo after echo, far across the sea. "Watch the top, my little man."

Overtaxed by waiting, and excited by anxiety for her boy, Elise had unconsciously shouted out a sister's warning.

While the sailor stopped, astonished, Firmin raised his head and saw him close at hand.

He did not give even a start of surprise. Quickly and resolutely, for he was determined to escape, seeing himself cut off in front and above, he flattened himself on the bowsprit and slipped down one of the cables stretched beneath it. He hoped to reach the figure-head of Fortune, and there to find refuge from his pursuers on her breast, as on that of a protecting divinity.

Unfortunately, in his haste he made a false move, lost his balance, and disappeared under the waves.

A cry of terror re-echoed from the deck of the *Jeune-Adolphine* like the cry of a mother in distress.

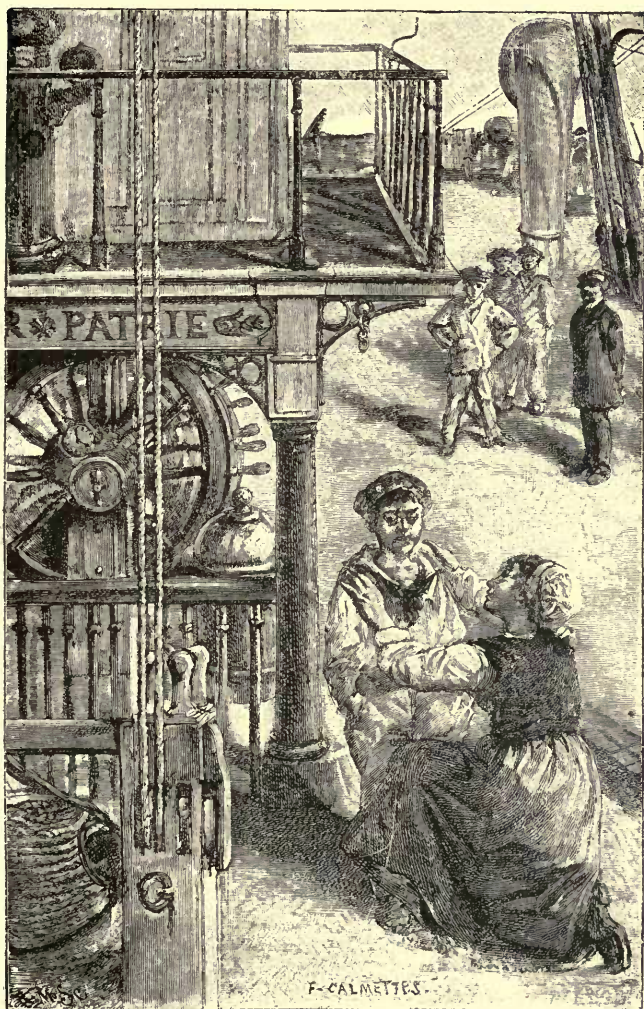
But at that very moment a boat appeared from the other side of the corvette, just in time to seize Firmin, as he came to the surface, and row him to the *Jeune-Adolphine*. Two sailors caught him under the arms, and made a rope fast around him.

"Hoist him up!"

Misery! As they were lifting him he managed to slip from the rope, fell back into the water, and disappeared from sight between the boat and the ship.

"Seize him quick. He cannot swim."

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"CALM YOURSELF, ELISE, WE SHOULD MAKE THE OTHERS LAUGH."

What was Elise saying—He not swim! The scamp, he could swim like a porpoise! He passed under the boat, reached the corvette, scaled her ladder, and was on the deck he loved.

“Captain, keep me. I want to become an officer.”

The captain called Elise, and they began talking again. The letter of the maritime prefect was only mandatory on one point. It directed that the boy should be taken to his sister, and this had been done. If now Elise would consent to his enlisting, they would keep her brother on board. He was cut out for a good sailor. It was a pity to deprive the country of his services.

“Come, my daughter, decide.”

Her eyes full of tears, her head drooping, her voice nearly undistinguishable, Elise gave her consent.

“Captain, it shall be as you wish, only let me embrace him.”

At last she pressed to her breast her lost child, the child she loved. What a flood of caresses, and what feverish kisses, she bestowed upon him.

“Firmin, my sweet little man, you are always beautiful. I tremble with happiness at seeing you.”

“Calm yourself, Elise, you will make the others laugh at us.”

“Have no fear. One does not laugh at those who love one another. Let me look at you.”

“Look, instead, how everything shines on a big ship.”

“It is your eyes that shine. I have no fancy for any other gleams.”

"And see how trim everything is, and how strong the rigging."

"What do I care? It is only you that I wish to admire—a long look, a long look, so that I may carry you away in my soul and eyes at least."

"Calm yourself, Lise. We shall meet again later on. I shall have won my rank. You will be proud."

"Oh, no! Such gains are made at too great a cost. Since we were born, we have never been separated."

"Elise, do go. You will make me lose my chance of being an officer. The captain will take back his word. There is an end to his patience."

And Firmin pushed his sister to the ship's side, where the ladder was fixed.

"Do go!"

Elise was overcome. She had had too many blows. She could restrain no longer the beating of her heart. Choking as she was, she forced herself to say good-by.

"I am going, captain. Be good to him."

She did not know how she got back to the *Jeune-Adolphine*. She seemed deaf even to the voice of Firmin, who cried gayly:

"Good-by, Elise! You will see me with stripes on my sleeves."

She passed without speaking before Silvere, Florimond, and Poidevin, and all the sailors grouped together, and walked rigidly to the forecastle. But she had barely reached there when her self-control gave way, and she threw herself on her box. With

her head resting on the edge of the bunk, she wept beside Barbet.

"My old Barbet, he does not love us any more; he has never loved us. He did not even speak of you, old Barbet."

With a look in which shone his tender heart, Barbet seemed to say:

"Friend, he must suffer who loves too well. If the affection of any one else can console you, be sure of mine. It is yours for life and death. Friend, there is still one who cherishes and adores you; your big Silvere, who knows not how to tell his love, but can prove it. Do you not see him silent and sad behind you. He weeps at your tears, and his heart beats in sympathy with yours. His arms are open, tell your sorrows to him. Is not a friend's heart a refuge for all who are wounded by ingratitude?"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SINCE morning the *Jeune-Adolphine* had been in the Channel. It was her last night at sea, for the next day at the evening tide she ought to be fast at the quay at Dieppe, whither she was bound to sell her fish.

Elise had been ordered to the helm during the second watch. Silvere had wanted to take her place. Since she had been so unhappy he had become more attentive, had spared her fatigue, had watched over her, and had anticipated her wants. Alas! she had no wants. She was wrapt in an indifference born of grief. He did not leave her; he comforted her by his affectionate glances and by that silent sympathy of which delicate natures know the secret.

What could he say? He had tried to speak of Firmin, but it awakened all her grief and she had burst into tears. He had ended by following her about like a faithful dog, as Barbet would have followed her if he had not been ill.

This community of suffering had made Silvere pale, so greatly had all these wakeful nights told upon him. Big men cannot endure a long strain. Elise now, not only refused fresh help from him, but for the last few nights, by her entreaties, had made him take his usual sleep. She herself was lying down for the first time since Barbet was ill,

and was dreaming of Firmin when the summons to the deck brought her back from the happy vision.

She was never late at her post. Without troubling her head about her companion of the watch, who was slower to wake, she hurried on deck to relieve the man at the wheel.

It was nearly the end of the full moon and the night was clear, though at times thick, slow-moving clouds hid the sky for long intervals. When Elise heard the closing of the hatch she could not tell which of the men came out. Whoever it was, he would be her only companion for several hours, for in light breezes two were enough to watch the boat.

Elise heard his steps in the bow as he went to take his place as lookout.

The weather was a little uncertain. At times one of the heavy clouds would send down a fine warm rain on the boat, and it was for that reason that they had taken the precaution to close the hatch.

There was a kind of languor in the air. Notwithstanding her accustomed vigor Elise was depressed. She was tired, body and soul, but under a presentiment of coming trouble she threw it off and held herself ready for action.

In spite of the darkness of the night she had a vague intuition that the figure, which she had hardly seen, was that of Florimond. What was he going to do, and what new fancy led him to take the place of one of the men? Since he had come on the *Jeune-Adolphine* he had not once offered to help in handling her. He had always preserved his dignity

as captain before the crew, and here he was this night taking the place of a common sailor.

Was it really he? In order to know certainly, and to recognize the man by the sound of his voice, Elise gave the usual call:

“Keep your eyes open there, in the bow.”

There was no response.

“Who is on the lookout?”

No answer.

“Is it not you, Cousin Florimond?”

Then, suddenly, she nearly let go the tiller. The heavy clouds had parted and the moon shone clear through their rents. In the sudden light Elise saw Florimond close to her. He was bent double and was sneaking along in the shelter of the bulwarks.

Then, in spite of herself, she was afraid. She remembered the day when, face to face with him in the capstan hatch, he had been so violent.

“What are you going to do, Cousin Florimond? I have not made you angry again, I suppose.”

He stood erect; he nearly touched her hand. At that moment the silvery rays shone on the sail behind him, and his huge broad figure stood out grandly against its white background.

Around him on the deck everything was hidden in the shadow. He looked almost more than human. His chest curved outward between his arms squarely set on his shoulders. His neck, with its strong cords, supported his head proudly. His face was strong, notwithstanding its pure oval. He was not terrible, he was beautiful.

“What do you want of me, Cousin Florimond?”

If I can grant it, I could never have the heart to refuse."

"I want your promise to marry me, Lise. You are the cleverest of the village girls, and I am the strongest of the men. We would make a fine couple, we two."

"Do you think so, cousin? I am not worth your notice."

"You saved me from the sea. You are the most daring of any of the girls."

"I am only a poor lass, and not made for riches, like you."

"You are made for me and I want you. I should never find any one who would do me more credit."

"Why do you want me? You do not like me at all."

"I owe you my life. I want to pay my debt."

"We will talk later on. This is not the time for it. Leave me to mind the helm."

"Listen, Elise, I want you. I believe that any man might be proud to marry you."

In Florimond's eyes Elise caught the jealous gleams which she feared. From the start, she had tried to refuse him without speaking of her engagement. She knew intuitively that she had but to mention Silvere's name to rouse the jealousy of the proud captain who had so suddenly become his rival.

She made another attempt to avoid a clash.

"Return to your post, Cousin Florimond. If there should be a collision we should be to blame."

"The other boats can look out for us."

"We will watch all the same. It is our duty."

"You wish to put me off, Lise. Do you not know me yet? If it is your Silvere who is in the way of your marrying me, he can look out for squalls."

"Why do you threaten him? Has he ever done you any harm?"

"He is a great soft, half-coward."

"On the contrary, he is braver and more generous than any one."

She stopped, confused at this outburst, in which her heart had spoken in spite of her lips.

She was not afraid for herself, for she did not believe her sturdy cousin would do a mean act. She had known him when he was a child, the most beautiful child in the village, and had seen him grow up to be the handsomest man. She knew that he was conceited, violent, and inconsiderate of others, but she thought these were the traits of strong characters. She endowed him with manly virtues, she thought him brave and incapable of common crimes.

Nevertheless, she was uneasy on Silvere's account, for he was not the kind of man to tolerate a rival, and foreseeing a quarrel between them she resolved to turn his anger on herself.

"Take your post, Cousin Florimond."

"No! Give up Silvere. He is too lazy for you."

And Cousin Florimond squared himself firmly on his legs as if to make the contrast between them more forcible.

"Go! Cousin Florimond."

"Give him up, *tonnerre!*"

"Never! I have given him my word."

"So much the worse. It will cost you dear."

"It will not cost me enough to make me break it."

"It will cost you your lover, Lise. Can he hold his own against me?"

"You have no right to quarrel with me about him. When you despised me, he alone stood by me. I should be unnatural if I were to forget his kindness. Take your post again, Cousin Florimond. Silvere has my word, and he will have it as long as I live."

"Enough. *Tonnerre!* You are playing a game to make me fall in love with you."

"He protected me against all the villagers. He has a good heart and kindly ways. Do not speak to me of marriage. He has given me his love. I have given him mine."

"Hold your tongue. Are you trying to make me kill him?"

"He is not afraid of you in the least, Cousin Florimond. He has faced stronger men than you, and, since you have no gratitude for what he has done for you, I will talk to you as you deserve. You are a better-looking man, but your face is disfigured by passion. You ask my love, but you get only my contempt. Do not speak to me! Do not speak to me!"

Florimond stepped toward her threateningly.

"You are too free with your tongue to-night, Elise. You are trying to find out what one gets

who braves me. For the last time I say it, give up Silvere."

"No, I love him."

"Look out, then! *Tonnerre!* You've brought it on yourself, girl."

And Florimond threw himself heavily on Elise, crushing her with his sinewy fingers.

"Are you trying to kill me, because I would not tell a lie?"

"Give him up!"

"Never, Cousin Florimond."

"Hold your tongue! I do not know myself! You shall give him up! *Tonnerre!* Give him up, I say!"

Not being able to force Elise to her knees, he took a step backward to make a fresh attack.

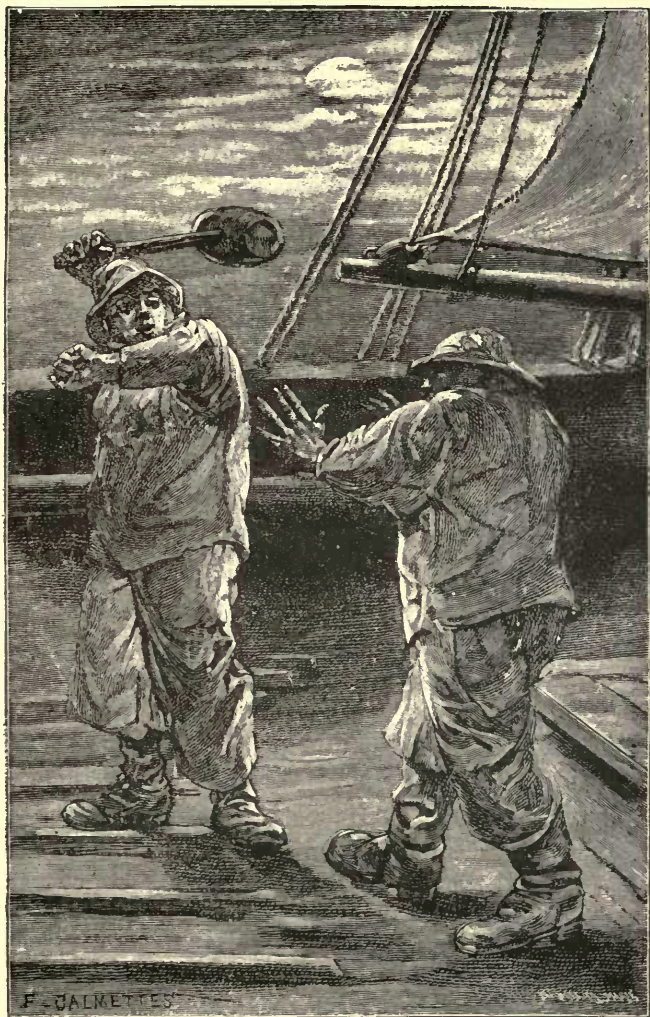
"No! Never—never—never!"

During the instant that she was free she had picked up something—anything to defend herself with, and handled it dexterously.

"Help, Silvere! Help, Poidevin! Help, all!"

In an instant Florimond was on his back, pinned to the ground by two hands and two knees, which held him in spite of himself. He fought desperately, he breathed hard, and the shock, as his back was forced down again and again to the deck, fairly made it tremble. He sputtered with rage. All the sailors came running, one after the other, and big Poidevin with them, puffing like a drunkard waked too soon.

Pale, and overcome with surprise and fright, the panic-stricken crowd stood there with wide-open



SHE HAD PICKED UP SOMETHING—ANYTHING—TO DEFEND HERSELF.

eyes, looking about to see if it was some strange nightmare which had brought them, only half awake, on deck.

"Do not let him go, Silvere. He will do some harm."

The sailors stood about, not daring to come near, and fearing even to touch this man, who had so strangely broken in on their sleep.

Barbet had wakened them. Stretched at length, without strength, unable to lift himself, but feverishly anxious, and hearing perhaps through the closed hatch Elise's troubled voice, he had whined, but the sleeping ears were deaf. Then, with a last effort, he had howled loud enough to wake at once all these snorers out of their heavy sleep.

And they had all rushed out, Silvere first, as he thought of his betrothed. It was he who had thrown Florimond down and was now holding him fast.

He had a strong grip, this big fellow. His timidity and his good-nature made him seem uncertain and weak. He was so bashful with women that he hardly dared to look into their eyes, and when he approached Elise he made himself gentle, as if to touch a child. But he was terrible at a time like this, when he was angry at men like himself. Under his firm hold it went hard with Florimond.

"Tie him up," said Poidevin suddenly. "We cannot arrange a guard of men to watch him all the time."

On shipboard they have a liking for summary

measures. It is the easiest way to secure the safety of the boat against mutineers. The sailors urged on Silvere, and among them the survivors of the *Bon-Pêcheur*, old Quarrelsome and the Stutterer, were the most furious.

"He is strangling already. Finish him, once for all, Silvere."

Then Elise forced her way through the men to where Florimond lay, and set him free.

"I do not want any one to be hurt on my account. Take your place again, cousin. I will go back to the helm, and Silvere will protect me."

CHAPTER XXIX.

“DRINK, I beg you, my old Barbet. Listen to your Elise. Drink a little—very slowly—but at least drink. You are all cold. It will warm you, old Barbet.”

She offered him some drops of brandy in the palm of her hand. He paid no attention to it. His lips were closed and shrivelled, a very bad sign. On her return from the watch Elise had found him lying stiff and without breath, as if his soul had passed in his last cry of distress.

“You are just as you were at first, but you will get better now, as you did then. If you will drink you will get well, my old Barbet.”

He lay motionless, and Elise watched him and wept.

Poidevin was snoring: all the men were asleep again. Florimond was seated on a box in the darkest corner of the room, half asleep, but the furrows in his forehead, his compressed lips, and the twitchings of his arms betrayed the feverish desire for vengeance which filled his whole being. Silvere alone watched by Elise's side.

He seized Barbet's jaws with his two hands and tried with all his might to unlock them. The lips opened a little and through them Elise succeeded

in slipping some drops of cordial, but they did not produce a single tremor.

"It is not true. It is not true," she cried, and from that moment she did not leave Barbet until they were in port.

It was to Dieppe that the *Jeune-Adolphine* had come to leave her fish. While the men hurried to the nearest tavern, Elise made her way to the town with Barbet in her arms.

She had sent Silvere to the sanitary bureau to get the addresses of doctors, and the agent, thinking that it was some man who was ill, had given him those of the principal physicians.

On seeing the curious patient they brought, one laughed, another was angry, and all sent Elise mournfully away without advice. From street to street she carried the dog, mounting the steps in vain, for everywhere she received the same refusal.

Finally, the servant of one of these doctors, an old woman who had more feeling than the younger ones, told Elise of a man thoroughly skilled in the care of beasts, who lived between the town and the open fields, in a place sheltered from the sea winds, where there was fresh air and grass.

"It will be fine for you here, my Barbet," said Elise as she reached the door, "but can I have the heart to leave you?"

Barbet did not answer. His head swung helplessly over Elise's arm, his glassy eyes could not speak. The opinion was not favorable. The veter-

inary made his diagnosis, screwing up his mouth and nodding his head.

"He is dead. Leave him. I will bury him to-morrow."

"Are you crazy, sir? Bury Barbet! As if one could find another friend like him! I would give my life for him, just as he would give his for me."

"It would be of no use. If he is not dead he is the same as dead. He will be underground before two days."

"Oh, no, sir! You will find out how to make him well, for you are a doctor. I will pay all expenses. The herring has furnished——"

She put Barbet quickly into Silvere's arms, and, drawing from under her skirt a canvas bag, held it up for the veterinary to see.

"The sale of the fish will fill it. There will be enough to pay you for curing Barbet."

Silvere interrupted, to promise still more.

"You are a couple of innocents," said the veterinary rudely. "Leave the dog with me."

"You will take me to board, too, sir. I am easy to please."

It was hard work to convince Elise that a hospital for animals was not a tavern; the dog only was taken. Fortunately there was an inn not far away, and Elise engaged a bed. She was going to live there during the time it took to sell and deliver the herrings.

She came hourly to the hospital door, rang the bell boldly, troubling the concierge and the servants, and even the master, to get news of Barbet. They

refused her entrance under the plea of interfering with his recovery, but she was so importunate that the surgeon ended by being interested in a dog which was the object of so firm a friendship. And so Barbet was saved. He was on the high way to recovery when the *Jeune-Adolphine* sailed. After a more careful and patient examination than he usually gave his patients, the veterinary had discovered the state of the injury, applied the right remedy and a solid dressing; then he had turned the animal over to Elise, dismissing her with a crabbed good nature when she was persistent in trying to pay for his care. She was carried away with delight.

"I was sure I should rescue you from death, my old Barbet. When we fight for our friends, we are strong against evil."

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The *Jeune-Adolphine* was sailing briskly toward her port. Barbet preferred the deck. He was in the bow, stretched on a pile of nets and mops, and it was thence that, six hours after leaving Dieppe, he saw again the well-known bay, with its gray outlines softened away into fog. Elise was near him. She lifted his head gently, and from afar he made out the white houses of the town behind the red sands of the dunes. As he saw these dear sights, his eye, so long bright with fever, recovered its limpid serenity.

The sun was just setting when the *Jeune-Adolphine* appeared in the harbor. She had been signalled a half hour before, on entering the channel,

and all those whose happiness was at risk with her, were waiting on the pier, impatient for her landing. Elise and Silvere saw Mother Pilote and good Mother Loirat. They threw toward them a long, joyful cry—a cry of home-coming, the lightest and most joyous of those which escape the human breast.

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They were to have a week on shore, and Elise passed it in her cabin, caring for Barbet. She had signed for the whole campaign, and could not think of breaking her engagement. Barbet was too weak yet to take up life on shipboard again, and their separation was close at hand, for the *Jeune-Adolphe* was to sail in two days.

Elise was all the while in tears. She did not dare to leave the dog to Mother Pilote, who could not be depended on to watch a sick person. She wished to leave him with Chrétien.

Chrétien had not gone to sea again. He had yielded to the wishes of Mother Loirat, who had been so greatly aged by her recent shock that she preferred poverty to being left alone. He fished from the beach, according to the season. It was a wretched occupation, but a safe one at least.

Since Elise had returned home he often made his way to her cabin. He would reach the house and watch her through the windows a long time before he knocked. As soon as he was within he would seat himself and remain an hour or two without saying anything, simply following her with his childlike look.

He had been there since noon, sitting in a corner of the cabin, and more restless and more silent than ever before. His eyes, naturally so quiet, were lighted at intervals by strange gleams. He fixed them longingly on the bridal bouquet, which, on the sideboard under a glass globe, shone brilliantly with its leaves of gold paper. Then he turned them to Elise as if in some secret trouble.

"What is it, Chrétien? tell me. Perhaps I may be able to comfort you."

She had no reply. She saw him look more earnestly than before at the bouquet, and then glance at her with a sort of sweet supplication. He seemed so sad, and to desire it so much, that she was not able to resist the pleasure of granting his silent prayer.

She ran to the sideboard, lifted the globe, took the bouquet, and, blowing the dust off the leaves, broke off the brightest and gave it to the young man.

"They say that it brings luck to lovers. Have you then a promise, Chrétien?"

"I shall never marry."

"What are you saying? You are especially made for home life."

"No. I cannot hope to be happy, for you are to marry another. I shall at least have the pleasure of dying for you."

Elise was sitting by Barbet, and as she talked she was running her fingers through his long hair, all tangled like that of a sick person. At Chrétien's word, she rose in surprise, and withdrew her hand so suddenly that she pulled out a tuft. Barbet did not

cry out, but he was not able to repress a little whimper of pain.

"Is it possible that I hurt you, my old Barbet? You made me do it, Chrétien, with your gloomy talk."

And leaning toward the dog, she petted him consolingly.

Their confidential talk once broken, Chrétien had not another word to say. He stayed a long time, abstracted and quiet, then, toward night, he went out, throwing at Elise a long look of farewell.

"Chrétien, where are you going? Tell me."

He was already some distance away. She followed him with her eyes for some seconds. He went toward the dunes by the road that led to the graveyard. Elise returned to Barbet and kissed his forehead.

"Do not be restless, Barbet. Chrétien had a strange look about him. I want to find out what he is going over there for."

She went out hastily and ran, for he was out of sight. She did not catch sight of him again until after she had climbed the top of the dune. He was not alone. As nearly as she could distinguish in the twilight, Florimond and big Poidevin were with him.

Nothing is so depressing as the coming of night. Oppressed with forebodings, Elise quickened her pace. What could bring them there, those three, so late, on this gloomy road? Could what she feared be true?

It was altogether improbable, she said; but the further she went the stronger grew her fears.

She recalled the strange actions of Cousin Florimond during the last few days. He was not a man to acknowledge defeat, and since his return he had renewed his attentions to her and his threats. He took advantage of the absence of Silvere, who had gone some distance into the country to announce his approaching wedding to some old relatives, and was delayed by business. But contrary to Florimond's expectations he had met a new champion of Elise's rights, for Chrétien had been only too happy to take up the duty of protecting her, if only for a week.

Had the two men quarrelled? At the very thought Elise trembled with fear. She knew how all these sailors' duels ended—duels with knives and without mercy.

She thought she should faint when she saw the three figures disappear suddenly in the Crow's Hole. They usually fought there in the ditch, the better to keep them face to face and prevent either from escaping. Elise tried to run, but her legs tottered under her. She tried to cry out, to frighten them by this approach of a stranger, but her voice died away in her throat.

She heard the voice of Poidevin directing the fight.

"To your work, lads. You know the custom. In a case of gallantry you strike to kill."

There were some frightful instants of silence; overhead the sea-gulls wheeled—sea-gulls drawn by the hope of blood; then came Poidevin's voice judg-

ing the blows. Then there was a hoarse clamor and two voices cried together:

"His account is settled. Yes, You have ripped him up like a sack."

"Who! Chrétien surely! Poor Mother Loirat!" And seized by a tremor of unconquerable anguish Elise fell prostrate on the sand. She had fainted.

• • • • •
"Ma'mselle Elise. It is I. Do you not know me! The bouquet has brought me luck."

Elise came to herself in the arms of Chrétien, who carried her to her cabin.

"Fear no longer, Ma'mselle Elise. Florimond will never trouble you again. He had sworn to kill Silvere."

CHAPTER XXX.

THE *Jeune-Adolphine* did not sail the next day. A good fellow, after all, Poidevin had a tender heart. Immediately after the fight, of which he had been a witness, he had gone to the tavern to drown his emotion, and he had drowned it so effectively that his reasoning faculties had gone with it.

Wandering through the town and tired of knocking at all the doors whose bolts would not move for his key, he had ended by occupying a very soft bed which he found in a damp ditch by the roadside. When the next morning they lifted him up, muddy and with water-cress in his beard and hair, he was helpless. His fat alone had saved him from a worse fate. Howling with rheumatism, he kept his bed for a month, while the *Jeune-Adolphine* waited impatiently in the harbor.

Silvere wished to take advantage of this respite and be married. On his recent trip he had recovered some important sums lent by his father to his country relatives. He was in easy circumstances as far as money was concerned. What was there to wait for.

They must wait for Barbet to get well. At least so Elise thought. She would not have a happy wedding if her old friend did not assist.

"Hurry and get well, my poor Barbet. I want you for a witness."

And a witness he was. Poidevin's illness continued beyond the doctor's expectations; the days grew into weeks. The end of October was at hand and the *Jeune-Adolphine* could not hope to go fishing before the new year. Already the sailors were dismantling her. They were not now driven by the fear of having to sail, and Elise herself began to wish for the long-announced marriage.

"Hurry to get well, Barbet. You will not put us off until winter, will you?"

For a fortnight Barbet had moved about the room, dragging his hind legs behind him. His strength came back very slowly.

"You will not be able to dance at the wedding, you poor old crippled Barbet."

He did not object to any remedies, salt baths, rubbings, tonics, but, much as he wished it, he could not get well. At last, near All Saint's Day, after hours of attempts which cost him many a twinge, he managed to stand on his four feet and walk. He tried it twenty times before Elise.

"You walk well now, my old Barbet."

And the wedding was fixed for the Saturday after Saint Martin's Day. On that day the sky was clear at the sun rising, with that blue of autumn which pales as it nears the horizon. The south wind blew softly, while the gray crows, the larks, the starlings, the green finches, and all the birds of passage filled the air with joyous cries.

At daybreak Elise went with Silvere to the grave-

yard to invoke from her parents the first of the benedictions she was to receive that day. She slowly climbed the dune road, supported by him whom she was so soon to accept before men and for eternity as her only master, her protector, and her husband.

Half-way up she stopped. Below her the gulf hid beneath its scintillations the deep abyss, but as she saw it from afar, so laughing and so treacherous, Elise had not the tremors of other days. One is not afraid of what one knows.

"Silvere," she said simply, "one clings closer to happiness when one has fought for it."

Then she threw a last glance beyond the gulf toward England, and her breast swelled with emotion at the remembrance. Her thoughts flew to Firmin, the lad of her choice, whom she had loved so much. Notwithstanding all, she reproached herself for leaving him. She said to herself that soon other cares would take all her time, and some day, perhaps, she would have children of her own who would awake in her new inquietude and new duties.

Silvere watched her, lost in this far-off revery. She lifted her eyes to his unconsciously, and seeing that he divined her thoughts tried to hide them in a smile. But he quickly reassured her.

"You will always love your Firmin, will you not? Since he is your brother he shall be mine, Lise. In a household all friendships should be shared."

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After the blessings of the relations, comes that of the mayor. The procession left the cottage, Silvere

at its head, very handsome in his new clothes, with his brown hat and his blue shirt with a heart embroidered on it. Radiantly happy, Mother Pilote, hanging on the arm of her great son, trotted gaily along in her holiday costume of red skirt and green shawl.

Elise was married in white. That is the rule for young girls. She marched second in the procession, and took no one's arm in order that she might have Barbet beside her.

He advanced gravely, as was due to the occasion. The night before, on seeing them bring her white dress and crown of orange blossoms, he had foreseen this holiday, and had given Elise no peace until she had taken out from the chest his tarnished lace and chevrons. He had insisted on her rubbing and polishing them for more than an hour, and attired to his taste he yielded place to no one.

Then came Silvere's relatives and Chrétien and Mother Loirat; finally M. Emile, who half-disappeared under a huge bouquet of chrysanthemums all tied up in white ribbons. It was the gift of the commissaire of Saint-Valery, and M. Emile thought it so beautiful that he wanted to carry it all day. It took both his arms to hold it, and he had to lean his head back so far that twenty times he nearly lost his high hat, which had been all newly polished.

The mayor received the company with his best smile. He pretended to accept Barbet as witness, and the dog acted his part and responded to each inquiry the same as the others. When asked, according to the usual formula, "Do you agree to take Silvere

Pollene here present for your husband?" Elise answered softly in her sweet voice. Barbet, doubtless judging the "Yes" not said with sufficient firmness and vigor, treated it by his loudest bark.

He was not provoked, when, as they left the *mairie*, Elise took Silvere's arm. He kept through the whole walk his own company, instead of going with Mother Pilote, whom they tried to make him take as companion.

Mother Pilote herself was so full of smiles, so foolishly happy, that she amused herself by trying to reconcile Barbet to his new companion.

"You will not make anything by changing, Barbet. What do you expect? From youth to age; it is always so in life."

It was worse still for Barbet at the church. He entered quietly, like a person of importance. The beadle tried to drive him out; he showed his teeth. Then Elise, without thinking of her white dress, took him boldly up and carried him out to the Place. She made up, to console him, such wheedling excuses and faithful promises, that he was content.

They met again happily after the ceremony. All the town was assembled along the route and, under showers of flowers which the girls flung, in the midst of the firing of guns and letting off of powder with which the young men of the village deafened them, between the congratulations of the old people and the cries of wondering children, the company walked to Silvere's house for the mid-day meal. Then, faithful to custom, after it they set out again for the fields.

Animals were grazing in the meadows fresh from the autumn rains. Elise recognized those through which she had run on that mournful night. They were still green with the aftermath, while beyond them, in place of ripening wheat and blossoming flowers, the new-ploughed ground awaited the seed that was to bring a fresh crop.

The procession, led by two violins and a fife, who had asked the honor of taking part, kept its ranks a long time.

Silvere overtopped by a head all his relatives and friends, and thus overlooking all, he did not lack dignity. Besides, since he was assured of Elise, he had gained in ease. His long arms and big hands, which were so embarrassing to him before, assumed a fresh and nearly natural grace.

He held Elise by the hand after the fashion of village lovers, and did not speak. These simple souls knew how to love and be silent. He marched along, looking about with the astonished gaze of the sailor, to whom all rural things are strange. But in the pressure of Elise's hand he felt a delicious tremor which stirred his heart like a caress.

They reached the first village; some cottages half-hidden away among trees. They were expected. On the steps of the tavern the young girls in their Sunday dresses offered them cake and beer in exchange for small silver. It is a tradition of the district. Elise was expected to drink with Silvere. She just wet her lips and handed the glass to her husband, who emptied it at a draught, as if he were drinking the aroma of her he loved. Then they ate

together of the cake, exchanging a glance of infinite sweetness, a glance in which could be read the thoughts of their hearts. Henceforth to them all was to be in common, sorrow, joy, strength and weakness, good and evil, all the life of the body and the life of the soul.

It was the same at tavern after tavern. According to the custom they could not skip one. They stopped, drank, paid, and took up their march, but the procession began to lose its first regularity. The young people grew animated and kept step with the violins as they entered the villages. Then Silvere and Elise led off the marriage march. But when, overcome with delight at his happiness, he held her close or, leaning toward her, brushed the hair on her forehead, she gently and delicately disengaged herself and ran to the mothers, whose age made them fall far behind. She embraced them and encouraged them, taking the occasion to smile at M. Emile and Barbet.

These two shared the end of the procession with the old people, the little clerk perspiring under his bouquet, the dog a little stiff in his legs.

Chrétien alone of all did not seem happy. His steel-gray eye, as it turned toward Elise, seemed full of a plaintive sorrow. One cannot cure themselves of a heart wound in a day.

The supper, the real wedding feast, had been ordered at the sailor's tavern. Elise had not been willing that Mother Pilote should have the fatigue of it. At the great table, where the mugs of beer and the white dishes sparkled under the lamps, each

one was seated according to his merit and rank. The happy pair were midway, opposite the mayor, then the witnesses and the relatives. The young people were at each end. There was no fish served; they had enough of that every day. When they were tired of the meat courses, bottles of old cider were emptied, frothing, into the glasses. It was the happy moment when the satisfied stomach sets the tongue free. Barbet himself, on his seat beside Elise, notwithstanding the majesty of his dress, shared the general talk.

Suddenly the door opened, allowing the entrance of a noisy crowd, who elbowed one another in their haste, as if pushed from behind. In the front were Old Quarrelsome and the Stutterer, and the other sailor of the *Bon-Pêcheur*—the three whom Elise had saved. They bore their present, a little sloop, which they had made together. The first had carved the hull, the second had put in the masts and the rigging, the third had added the sails and painted it in bright colors. The name, *Bon-Pêcheur*, was on its stern, with the date, as a souvenir.

A souvenir in which there was blended some sadness. The last survivor of the *Bon-Pêcheur*, Florimond, was not there. But he was alive. The blow of the knife which he had received would have killed twenty ordinary men. Fighting hard for life, he had recovered, but he was disfigured by a gash from his forehead to his chest. No longer able to be the handsomest captain on that coast, he had left it, and become a ship-owner at Calais.

The three advanced to offer their present. The

Stutterer wished to speak, Old Quarrelsome tried to prevent him, and it was the third man, who, finding nothing to say, gave the boat to the bride, kissing her hands as he did so.

Then four big fellows entered. They had been selected for their strength; a sailor, a coast guard, a fisherman, and one of the villagers, representing the different occupations of the town. Elbowing one another, they arranged themselves behind Elise's chair.

The mayor arose. He was not an orator, but a dealer in spirits, a good fellow with red cheeks and close-cut gray hair. He spoke simply. The whole town wished to make a festival for Elise, in order to make up to her in one day for the injustice she had suffered so many weeks. He made a sign. The four men had already seized the bride's chair.

"Wait. I have not executed my commission."

And making his way under the table, the little hunchback laid his bouquet on Elise's knees.

"Untie it, madame. I am too happy."

When the ribbons were unfastened, the bouquet fell apart into two clusters, in the center of each of which was pinned an envelope. The first she opened was an appointment for Silvere as assistant pilot.

The shouts and stampings which greeted this news were repeated like a happy echo on the stairs, then in the room below and on the Place.

Elise trembled as she opened the other envelope. She found in it a letter, and when she had run

through it her eyes shone, her cheeks reddened, and, seeing before her the happy face of the little hunchback, she seized him with both hands and embraced him with all her heart.

It was a letter from Firmin. It announced that he had passed the first of the steps that were to lead him to fortune. His good work and his progress at the school on board had distinguished him. He was a midshipman.

Then the mayor gave the signal again. The four big fellows carried Elise out. Her husband and the guests followed.

The Place, so gloomy when the wedding party had passed through it before the feast, had been transformed. It was in festal array. In the centre a mast, wreathed with flowers and surrounded with three tiers of lanterns, marked the place for the ball; the place where, many months before, the assembled villagers had stoned her in whose honor they were soon to dance.

Before opening the quadrille they drank to her health. The mayor, who was generous as well as rich, had furnished the liquor without charge. Each one had brought his glass and filled it at one of the casks, broached at the four corners of the Place. It was arranged that they should fall in line and pass before the bride and groom to clink glasses and drink to their health, but country people do not know how to do things. They did not fall in line. They pressed and crowded one another so that the glasses were half-emptied on the dresses and jackets. They had to go back and fill and

empty them again, but this time they emptied them standing by the cask.

And when they had drunk they danced. The night was cold, but they could warm themselves at the casks.

Long before midnight the old people went to bed. Elise had left the ball for more than an hour then, to accompany Mother Pilote, the poor old woman whose only child she was taking.

"Do not weep, Mother Pilote. You have not lost a son: you have gained a daughter."

She had been happy all day, but on finding herself alone in her house, the old woman was suddenly seized with sadness.

"Do not weep, Mother Pilote, you have two children to love you now, instead of one."

These outbursts of filial affection only made the separation more painful, and when Elise returned to the dancers she was still a little sober and quiet.

Toward morning the young people escorted the newly married pair home. On the steps of the cottage Elise embraced all the girls, her companions. After the farewells, Silvere wished her to enter first through the wide-open door. She turned to see if Barbet had followed, for in the noise of the dance they had forgotten him. But Barbet was not there, and all who were waiting until the door closed on them set out to hunt for him. Elise and Silvere found him on the step of the house in which Chrétien lived.

"What are you doing there, old Barbet? Are you hurt at me for having forgotten you?"



SHE WISHED TO CARRY HIM AWAY.

He tried to answer with a look. Elise could not understand at all. She wished to carry him away, and made him many excuses, prayers, and caresses. But he was firm against all.

That which he wanted to say she understood later. Since henceforth she had another one devoted to her service, since she was to be loved and protected all her life, Barbet could no longer serve her. He would take up his old life as a dog of the coast guard and the village. He would signal the incoming boats and take the children to school.

"Lise, let us leave him. Without doubt he is jealous because you are married."

She raised her beautiful, thoughtful eyes to Silvere and saw him all smiling with love. Then, hurt by this unspeakable trouble, yielding half-consciously to this new call of her spirit and carried away by the intoxication of this new happiness, she forgot her companion of evil days, her always firm friend, and for the first time in her life was unjust to Barbet. She thought him untrue and jealous.

But four years later, when she was the mother of two boys and the day came for the elder, her little Baptiste, to go to school, Barbet became his protector. Vigilant and faithful, the dog gave the son the same tender care which formerly he had given the mother. Then only did Elise understand Barbet. Devoted to the cause of the weak and afflicted, he would have failed of his destiny if he had stayed with her. The new master he had chosen, a master gentle and unhappy, Chrétien, sustained by his friendship, found once more that life was sweet. He

had become a coast guard, and had taken the place in the eyes of the village of Barbet's first master, the dead captain.

But Barbet had not waited for this far distant time to take up his old work, and each night when he brought home her little Baptiste, well kept and watched, Elise kissed on his nose this good friend.

"I am ashamed to have misunderstood you, Barbet. Are you not always right?"

THE END.

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